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As Soon as I’m Famous
by Stacey Elza

Thesis submitted to the
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of West Virginia University
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for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Creative Writing

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Abstract

As Soon as I’m Famous

Stacey Elza

This novel tells the story of Anna Finnegan, the only girl percussionist in the eighth-grade band. In her blog and e-mails to her friends, she shares the results of personality quizzes, posts her answers to e-mail surveys, and brags about her plans to one-up her enemies. But things get complicated once Anna confesses that she has a crush on her friend Cole. Suddenly, what she writes in her semipublic blog doesn’t always line up with what she writes in her private e-mails.
For Jackie
This novel was an accident.

When I started it in 2003, I only ever meant for it to be a short story about a girl named Anna Finnegan whose dog dies. That’s it. But the story got out of control (think: dandelions on the lawn; think: bread dough rising out of the pan), and the next thing I knew, Anna was pushing thirty and I’d written two hundred–plus pages. It wasn’t until I started my M.F.A. in 2004 that I realized most of those pages were, to be frank, poorly written. Even more alarming, they did not resemble the novels and stories I actually liked. I liked to read things that were subversive and droll and chicken-fried, yet I was writing something that was serious and melodramatic. Instead of writing a novel, I was writing what I thought a novel was supposed to be.

So I abandoned it. During my first year of fiction workshops, I’d trot out a section of my novel every once in a while and put it before the class, but after I’d read the comments my classmates had written on my submissions, I would file them away in a box and perform only the most cursory revisions. Instead, I would work on new pieces. I made them bizarre and operatic and Interesting with a capital I. I didn’t just write a story about a bored librarian with an overactive imagination; I wrote a story about a potentially homicidal librarian, setting half of the story in the protagonist’s Technicolor reality and half of it in her black-and-white, film-noir fantasies. I didn’t just write a short-short about a woman getting over her ex-boyfriend; I wrote a short-short about a man who gets crushed by a piano at the same moment that his ex-girlfriend is cured of a mysterious rash that covers her whole body. Never in a million years would I call these pieces
masterpieces—in fact, I’m embarrassed to look at them now, the same way I get embarrassed when I look at my “bath time” baby pictures—but there was something ridiculous and heightened about them that I still find admirable and that still creeps into my fiction. The difference is that, these days, I’m not trying so hard. I am getting better at getting out of the story’s way.

Eventually I realized that my novel didn’t have to tell Anna’s entire life history—in fact, that it probably shouldn’t. The part of her life that I found most intriguing, and that I imagined my readers would find most intriguing, was her middle-school years. That section of the novel was the most effortless to write and, later, the least tedious to read over. Coinciding with that revelation, my creative-writing professors suggested to me that my novel read a lot like a young adult (YA) work, an option I had not considered before. I started studying YA novels to get a feel for their tone and scope. I enrolled in Adolescent Fiction, did an independent study of humorous YA literature, and cruised the YA sections at Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com. What I discovered is that the boundaries of the genre are far muddier than I had expected. For instance, in Adolescent Fiction, we studied books that seemed overtly directed at a young readership (Carolyn Mackler’s The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things, Karen Hesse’s Out of the Dust, Louis Sachar’s Holes); classics that transcend age demographics (Huck Finn, Catcher in the Rye, The Color Purple); contemporary novels with mature overtones (Alice Sebold’s The Lovely Bones, Mark Haddon’s The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time); and one novel in which a kiddie story is shaped by the perspective of an adult, memoirist narrator (Gary Paulsen’s Harris and Me). It seems that the single thread
drawing these very diverse titles together is the fact that they all feature adolescent narrators. Beyond that, all bets are off.

Even pinning down the age range of YA readers is tricky. The Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association, claims the range is twelve to eighteen.\(^1\) The *Children’s Writer’s and Illustrator’s Market* claims, slightly more vaguely, ages twelve and up,\(^2\) which makes me wonder, could a nineteen-year-old college freshman be part of the YA target audience? At Amazon.com, books included on their “Teens” page are tagged for different age groups by the online store (e.g., “Ages 9–12,” “Young Adult”) and further subdivided by various reviewers such as *Booklist* and *School Library Journal*. One book featured on the “Teens” page, *Alice in April* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor, is suggested for children aged nine through twelve by Amazon.com, children aged nine through thirteen by *Publishers Weekly*, and children in grades five through eight by *School Library Journal*.\(^3\) Moreover, two books in Louise Rennison’s YA series (*Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging* and *On the Bright Side, I’m Now the Girlfriend of a Sex God*) have been combined together into one, double-decker edition called *Confessions of Georgia Nicholson*, after whose title Amazon.com has added this cryptic parenthetical notation: “(adult).” (According to readers’ reviews, the “adult” version is no different from the YA originals.)\(^4\) Is it any wonder that one graduate-level course at Hollins University (ENG 546: The Modern

Young Adult Novel) encourages students to ask themselves, “Is there really such a thing as ‘young adult’ literature?”

Despite the broad territory that YA covers—in terms of tone, subject matter, and readership—many of the books I read during my coursework had a light, naïve, and often funny tone that I found refreshing: *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things; Harris and Me; Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging;* Gail Carson Levine’s *Ella Enchanted;* Joan Bauer’s *Rules of the Road;* and Lemony Snicket’s *The Austere Academy.* I wanted to write about my thirteen-year-old protagonist in a way that was just as light, naïve, and funny (and, dare I say, wacky). What better avenue than YA?

And so began *As Soon as I’m Famous,* take two. This time around, I tried to inject humor and absurdity without making the story seem too divorced from reality, which, looking back, was one of the fatal errors behind my librarian story, my piano story, and the others of their ilk. What I realized is that life is usually absurd enough on its own, rendering shoehorned dreamscapes and forced magical realism unnecessary. For example, I got the idea to make Anna’s mother buy hundreds of dollars of steaks from a door-to-door salesman because I myself am a sucker for door-to-door salesmen and have fallen for similar ploys. (I am not too proud to admit this.) That plot point ended up fitting nicely into the story arc and had lucky repercussions throughout the whole novel. And, of course, navigating the social scene of middle school is the height of absurdity in and of itself. Adolescence is one long stint of turning molehills into mountains. Everything is Interesting with a capital *I.* Your nemesis makes you drop your book bag, and your life is over. Your crush lends you his drumsticks for band class, and you’re over

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the moon. Who needs film noir when there’s the bus ride to school? Who needs falling pianos when there’s the backhanded compliment, the snippy e-mail, the cold shoulder? The poem “What Girls Do,” written by an anonymous twelve-year-old and included in Rachel Simmons’s *Odd Girl Speaks Out*, exemplifies the unending drama that is middle school:

A shake of the head, a roll of the eyes  
The rumors the lies  
They no longer play on your pride  
But rip you up inside  
This is what girls do  
This is what they say  
It is like this every day  
The mothers reply  
But that is a lie  
Walking in the hall  
Taking in it all  
All alone no one home  
Kids shouting, kids staring  
All this torture I’m bearing  
No one caring⁶

Using blog and e-mail formats for my novel proved to be a convenient, fast-paced, and relatively novel method (no pun intended) to illustrate Anna’s attempts to control her social standing. She could blog one version of events for everyone to see and e-mail a different version to certain friends. She could use her blog to air her grievances, but she could do so in such an indirect way that backpedaling always remained an option in case her enemies confronted her. (If my personal experience is any indication, passive aggression is often the weapon of choice for adolescent girls.) Although the blog and e-mail formats seemed catchy to me, they had a practical application that kept them from feeling like a mere gimmick. To quote the design adage: form follows function. The results of Anna’s personality quizzes and online surveys may be funny, but they also serve the greater purposes of developing Anna’s character and moving the story forward.

While it is indeed important to keep the story moving forward in a YA novel, I tried not to sacrifice substance for the sake of speed. My aim was to create a work that was entertaining as well as reflective, but I resisted the YA trend to load up my novel with “issues.” Though I wanted As Soon as I’m Famous to be more than just a trifle, I had no interest in writing a “problem novel.” True, my novel does touch on feminism—I have, after all, cast Anna as the only girl percussionist in the eighth-grade band, and Anna does enter into the world of flirting and dating, with all of its gender-related expectations—but I have tried to keep the story itself, not life lessons, at the forefront. I may be an accidental novelist, but I have tried not to become an accidental moralist. The stories and novels that have stuck with me, whether written for adolescents or adults, are those with complex characters and an air of ambiguity, those that are more like philosophical playgrounds than obstacle courses: “The Poteen Maker” by Michael
McLaverty, Crackpots by Sara Pritchard, “Modern Love” by Abigail Thomas, “Gryphon” by Charles Baxter, Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Café by Fannie Flagg, The Color Purple, and just about anything by Grace Paley or Flannery O’Connor. I find that problem novels oven force their readers to view the story through a certain lens (e.g., the dangers of drug use, the tragedy of teen pregnancy, the fallout from divorce). I agree with Ann Hulbert, who writes in an article for Slate, “The genre [problem novels], as teachers have discovered with the help of accompanying guides, lends itself to trendy and tidy didacticism.” As a consequence, problem novels run the risk of letting their issues upstage, even flatten, their characters. Carl Hiaasen’s Hoot comes to mind. Although Hiaasen’s characters are likeable, his humor effective, and his prose casually elegant, the moral of the story (“protect the environment”) hijacks the novel’s climactic scene: the attendants of a save-the-owls protest form a circle, join hands, sing “This Land is Your Land,” and watch as one of the endangered owls swoops down into the center of their circle and, as if on cue, perches on the head of Mullet Fingers, one of the novel’s primary characters. For that reason, Hoot, along with other problem novels, has never set particularly well with me. On the other hand, Hoot was a Newbery Honor Book, so maybe I’m missing something.

Still, just as Anna Finnegan has a weakness for coffee even though she knows it will trigger her insomnia, I have a weakness for Angus, Thongs, and Full-Frontal Snogging even though I know it doesn’t feature the most complex characters. If Celie in The Color Purple is an aged Cabernet Sauvignon, then Georgia in Snogging is a bottle of pink champagne. And if the personality quizzes Anna takes are to be believed, she is “café au

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lait. Mild, agreeable, and comforting. Strong but smooth. A balanced person.” I hope I have succeeded in making *As Soon as I’m Famous* a similarly strong, smooth, balanced, and—above all—comforting book.
Dear Darcy,

Help me. I’m desperate.

I know most girls who write to you have questions about guys or clothes, but I’m writing to you about something else. I’m writing about a job.

You know how at the bottom of your “Dear Darcy” column, it says in tiny print that you receive a lot of letters every month and don’t have time to answer each one? Well, if you hired me, I could answer a few of those letters for you and help out some more girls who have problems. And since I’m thirteen, I would be really good at relating to the girls writing in. (You’re already really good at relating to them, even though you’re thirtyish. Age is just a number.) And who knows? Maybe I could even have my own advice column one day: “Dear Anna.”

Also, if you hired me, you would be supporting a good cause—feminism! You see, when school starts in a few weeks, I’m going to be the only girl percussionist in the eighth-grade band (just like I was the only girl percussionist in the seventh-grade band and the sixth-grade band). All the other percussionists hate me, except for one, who’s my friend. The worst part is, because they don’t like me, I always get stuck playing the instruments no one else wants, like cowbell. With the money I earned writing for Glow, I could buy my own drum set. That way, I could practice on it and get really good. (Now I
put pillows on the floor and practice on them. Trust me, it’s not the same.) We don’t have
drum set in middle school, but the high-school band does, and when I get there, I want
to be the one who plays it. I never want to play cowbell again. I want to make the guys
play cowbell for once. Isn’t that what feminism is all about?

Yours truly,

Anna Finnegan from Hanover, WV

P.S.: I’m sorry if you’re not really thirtyish yet. I’m just judging by the picture in
“Dear Darcy.”

P.P.S.: It’s a very nice picture!

P.P.P.S.: If you can’t hire me, could you give me some advice about how a thirteen-
year-old girl can earn a lot of money fast?

P.P.P.P.S.: I’m going to write in my blog to see if any of my friends have ideas about
how to earn money. This is the sixth time I’ve e-mailed you about a job, and you haven’t
written back yet, so I may not hear from you this time either. Not that I’m trying to make
you feel bad about it or anything. I’m just saying.

P.P.P.P.P.S.: If you don’t know anything about earning money fast, could you at least
give me some tips for getting revenge?
**MONEY**  
*Saturday, August 16, 9:02 p.m.*

Does anybody have any ideas about how I can make some money to buy my own drum set? I’ve written “Dear Darcy” about a job (again), but she probably won’t write me back (again). I know she must get a million e-mails and letters every day, but please, I’m sure she could take five minutes out of her oh so important life. Like she’s so busy.

I read this thing about a girl who made a ton of money selling used DVDs on eBay, but I don’t have any used DVDs that I want to get rid of—unless anyone wants to give me some of theirs. ;-) Besides, I bet you’d have to sell a lot of DVDs to afford a drum set. It would take forever.

**WHAT VEGETABLE IS YOUR BODY?**  
*Saturday, August 19, 5:18 p.m.*

Read what this stupid quiz said about me:

“Your body shape is ‘carrot.’ Lucky you! Tall and thin. A willowy beauty. Always a classic. You can pull off any look with grace. Famous ‘carrots’: Charlize Theron, Nicole Kidman, Audrey Hepburn.”

Sure. Like I’m so lucky. I just had to shop for school clothes at Gap Kids. Everybody else can buy their pants at the regular Gap by now. And when I went to buy some boots, I couldn’t find any that fit my legs tight. They were floppy like galoshes. Can you imagine? Leather galoshes on the first day of school? Yeah, that’d be way graceful, let me tell you.
The pants I got at Gap Kids all fit me kind of short. Mom said they all looked fine when she made me try them on and walk around a minute ago. Please. She’s totally lying. The bottoms of them hardly hit my shoes. They’re supposed to be so long you can step on them in back.

Also: I found Andrea “Sugarplum” Ogilvy’s blog. She’s not smart enough to make it so only people on her friends list can see it (like how, if you’re reading this, I’ve made you my friend). So, even though I am not Sugarplum’s friend, I get to make fun of her pink, sparkly-warkly, fairy background, but she doesn’t get to see my blog (with its bamboo background, which is way more mature if I do say so myself—and I do).

**BUZZING**  
Wednesday, August 23, 2:40 p.m.

Drank a whole pot of coffee by myself today. Mom wouldn’t have let me because thirteen is “too young” (the same thing she said when I told her I was a vegetarian), so I made it when she and Dad were at work. I poured the coffee into travel mugs and hid them in my closet. Spent all morning drinking while I listened to Foxboro’s new CD, *Caddisfly*.

I had another coffee at the gas station, too, while Billie and I sat in our booth and waited for Ms. White to bring our soup and corn fritters. I was listening to *Caddisfly* on my earphones and trying to drum along on the table, but the salt and pepper shakers kept rattling, and finally Ms. White said she’d give me a piece of coconut pie if I’d please stop that pounding.

The pie was excellent.
Also: I’ve been doing some thinking. If I were a percussionist—I mean, a real percussionist, not just a school-band percussionist—I think my trademark would be bright-colored sneakers. Orange and yellow and lime green with crazy-colored shoelaces. People wouldn’t be able to see them when I was behind the drum set, but they could see them when I walked onto the stage or when Spin printed my picture.
Billie,

Making my percussionist trademark be funky handbags sounds fun, especially your “gong” idea (gold, round handbag) and your “snare” idea (white handbag with silver buckles). You could make me a “wind chimes” handbag, too (lots of gold fringe). But I wouldn’t want to do the handbag thing instead of the sneaker thing. I’d want to do both, even if bright sneakers and shoelaces are “like something from the 1980s.” What’s wrong with the 1980s? Aren’t you always saying retro stuff is “chic”?

Anyway, I was reading Glow, and I found these tips on how to make a guy like you:

1. Do: Relax. Don’t: Get all tense.
2. Do: Be yourself. Don’t: Pretend to be the girl you think he’d want you to be.
3. Do: Be brave and talk to him. Don’t: Wait for him to make the first move.
4. Do: Care about your appearance when he’s around. Don’t: Wear gaudy outfits to attract his attention.
5. Do: Find excuses to touch him. (They gave examples, like patting his hand.) Don’t: Be all over him.
6. Do: Find out what he’s interested in and see if you can like it, too. Don’t: Learn about all of his interests and show off your knowledge in his presence.
I don’t think I could ever do #5. I’d start blushing, and then he’d know how nervous I was. If only my skin weren’t so pale, maybe people wouldn’t be able to tell so easily if I was blushing or not.

Anna

P.S.: That sucks about your dad. Why would he yell at you for not getting the dishes washed (especially since you were washing them—you were just letting them soak for a little while first), but he never yells at Cole? That’s so unfair. The good thing about being an only child is you don’t have to worry about your parents yelling at your brother/sister more than at you. The bad thing about being an only child is that you’re the only one they have to yell at, and you can’t blame anything on anybody else.

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: want to come over?
Sent: Wednesday, August 23, 8:18 p.m.

Cole,

Sure, I’d love to watch Caddisfly with you. I can’t believe your dad bought you the concert DVD. I’m so jealous.

Pizza sounds great. Just remember to ask your dad to order one that’s cheese-and-mushrooms-only for me.
Anna

P.S.: Yeah, you’re right, Billie shouldn’t sulk around like that. It’s not your fault she didn’t do the dishes when she was supposed to.
Thanks for sending me your ideas for earning money for a drum set. I’ve been thinking a lot about it on my own, too. Here’s the list of ideas so far:

1. Go online and auction off all the collectors’ dolls Mom has given me. The southern-belle doll would probably get the most money, but it sure would feel good to get rid of the cowgirl with the droopy eye. That one creeps me out.

2. Put an ad in the Hanover Bugle to sell my TV. Instead of watching Fuse and the CW, I’ll read more stuff—especially stuff for class. I’ll stop making C’s in social studies. I’ll make A’s, get into Harvard (or Yale or whatever), and work for Filter or Spin and earn even more money.

3. Make seashell necklaces and sell them. (Thanks, Billie!)

4. Design handbags (like Billie) and sell them.

   Clarinet player: Billie. Guitarist: ??? Bassist: ??? (Thanks, Cole!)

6. Make jar candles with paraffin wax and cool filling-stuff, like peppermints and silk flowers.

7. Buy tarot cards. Tell fortunes. (But don’t let Mom know! Eternal grounding, “You’re in it deep this time, Anna,” etc. She thinks tarot cards are evil ever since she saw this show called “The Occult and You.”)

8. Wash cars. Wash windows. (Thanks, Steve!)


11. Beg Dad. (Maybe not.)

**WHAT KIND OF BIRD ARE YOU?**
*Monday, August 28, 2:10 a.m.*

I took this bird quiz I found on Steve’s blog:

“You are the blue jay. Charm and cheer are your characteristic traits. You may not be the flashiest bird, but your sweetness has gained you many loyal friends. You can make any day feel like springtime. Surprising fact: The blue jay can imitate other birds’ calls.”

I think I’m more of an owl. It said that owls are sleek and fearless and mysterious.

At least it didn’t tell me I was a macaw. I’d hate to be like one of Mom’s annoying birds. Mom made me feed them today. Sassafras bit a hole in my shirt. Ginger looked me right in the eye and unloaded a big turd (on purpose?).

**DO YOU HAVE A SLEEP DISORDER?**
*Monday, August 28, 2:18 a.m.*

Uh-oh. This other quiz told me that I should consult my doctor because I “have symptoms of insomnia.” It said that “the sleep cycle is an important, though often neglected, component of a healthy life.”

I’m going to do a search for sleep doctors right now.

**ARE YOU A HYPOCHONDRIAC?**
*Monday, August 28, 2:38 a.m.*
Apparently I am 80 percent hypochondriac. (Click here to try the quiz.)

But I really can’t sleep tonight! Isn’t that what insomnia is?

I DID drink another pot of coffee today, though . . .

**TWO TRICKY THINGS**

*Monday, August 28, 3:54 a.m.*

I’m starting to wind down now. The bus comes at 7:45 tomorrow (really today).

Should I sleep for three hours or just ride it out? Sleep is looking better and better, especially since it’s raining. That sound always knocks me out.

**LIKE MONDAYS AREN’T BAD ENOUGH ON THEIR OWN**

*Monday, August 28, 10:16 a.m.*

I’m in word processing class right now. Mr. Taylor said we could have free time as soon as we finished typing the business letter in our book. (What a pointless first day!) Stupid Andrea is at the computer two down from me. When I went to get the hall pass, she was looking at the Web site for Smith College. Who thinks about college when they’re not even in high school yet?

Mom woke me up this morning by hammering in the birds’ room. She was playing her Carpenter’s CD (“Rainy days and Mondays always get me down . . .”) and saying “Who’s a pretty bird?” so Sassafras would say his name. (All Ginger can say is “Hello.”) When I walked in, Mom was hanging up pictures of blue macaws that looked just like Ginger and Sassafras. She was hanging them over the TV.

“Hello,” said Ginger. Sassafras hissed at me.
Mom had on her green suit and one hot roller clipped to her bangs. “They’re saying good morning!” she said. Then she banged her thumb with the hammer and swore.

I wish she’d never seen that episode of *Rework It!* where they made a whole room for some guy’s cats to play in. That’s what started all this.

Anyway, I couldn’t find my frog umbrella so I had to use Dad’s black one with the sticky-outy spokes. I was wet on one side when I got to the bus stop. There was a new kid. I don’t know his name yet so I’ve been calling him The Annoying Kid in my head. You’ll see why soon. Got to go. Mr. T’s talking homework.

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**LIKE MONDAYS AREN'T BAD ENOUGH ON THEIR OWN (PART 2)**

*Monday, August 28, 4:57 p.m.*

Home now.

Anyway, The Annoying Kid sat down next to me in the bus-stop shelter this morning and asked what I was writing in my notebook. (I was writing down things I want for my birthday. Only forty-eight days to go.)

I closed it up and lied that it was something for school.

He put his sunburned face close to mine (who gets a sunburn when it’s almost September?) and I leaned way back. His breath smelled like tuna (WHO EATS TUNA FOR BREAKFAST?). He was all, “Didn’t look like something for school.”

And I was all, “Don’t worry about it.”

He rubbed the “Meat is Murder” sticker on the cover and asked what it meant. Then he tried to pull it out of my hands. Dirty trick.
Well, you know me, I held on tight. I wanted to pinch his knee, but The Annoying Kid is nine or ten. Push him too hard, I’ll look like a bully. Not hard enough, I’ll look like a baby. Plus, it seems ratty to pinch somebody’s knee if you don’t know their name.

I jerked my notebook away and jammed it into my tote bag. The drumsticks inside clacked together. Then The Annoying Kid tried to pull MY WHOLE BAG away.

When I told him to leave me alone, he repeated what I’d said in this high voice. When I told him to shut up, he repeated that, too.

That’s when somebody banged on the wall. A hand reached into the shelter—there was a turquoise ring around the thumb—and smacked him on the forehead.

It was Jordan, the High School Kid who always wears cowboy boots and lots of jewelry. She told him to shut up. He didn’t repeat HER. All I could hear was the rain and the slippery noise his raincoat made when he fidgeted.

I told Jordan thank you and thought, “Anna Finnegan, you know better than to say that.”

Jordan said, “Don’t mention it, Stick,” and all the High School Kids laughed. One of them started flicking their lighter. They all smoke.

I’m just glad nobody called me Skeleton this time.

Or Beanpole, or Olive Oyle, or Anorexic (which I’m not), or Skin-and-Bones, or Bag of Bones, or just plain Bones.

Or, my personal favorite, Anna Thinnegan. Yes, tee hee, isn’t that clever? And then there’s the new twist they put on it last year: Banana Thinnegan.

Anyway, the High School Kids started talking about some people who hooked up after a party, but before the story got going, the bus came. The brakes hissed (like
Sassafras!), and the door folded open. We piled in. I was last. I’m one of the last stops on
the route, too, so the bus is always close to full by the time I get on. This morning I had
three choices: wake up someone who was asleep and make them scoot over, sit near the
back with the High School Kids (certain death), or sit next to Andrea “Tanning Bed”
Ogilvy, behind her fiends (oops, I mean, “friends”) Jocelyn and Kimberley.

Ms. Silver, the bus driver, snapped at me to “Sit! Down!” so I started down the aisle,
staring hard at sleeping people and trying to mind-control them awake—which doesn’t
work, BTW.

Crap. Mom just yelled and asked me if I’m on the Internet, and when I said yes, she
said I’d been online too long. That means she’s done watching “How to Bring Your
Family Closer Together” in the birds’ room and wants to check her e-mail.

LIKE MONDAYS Aren’T BAD ENOUGH ON THEIR OWN (PART 3)
Monday, August 28, 5:59 p.m.

I’m back.

Now Mom has turned it to a different talk show: “He Left Her at the Altar.”

Anyway . . .

I decided to sit with Tanning Bed. Her bag of basketball stuff was taking up half the
seat. I asked if I could sit by her, and she said, “Anna, do you HAVE to?”

Jocelyn and Kimberley laughed. They were wearing angora sweaters like Tanning
Bed’s. Suck-ups.
Ms. Silver yelled again, so Tanning Bed put her bag in her lap. I sat. She asked Jocelyn and Kimberley what they had been talking about before they were interrupted. Before she said “interrupted,” she looked at me.

Kimberley said they were talking about band geeks, and Tanning Bed was all, “Like Billie Martin and her brother. What’s his name? Cole? They’re so lame. Especially Billie. She’s always wearing such weird clothes.”

My stomach tightened. Billie and Cole are my best friends.

Tanning Bed went on: hyper-lame, lame supreme, lame squared (because they’re twins).

I couldn’t take it. I went for the nearest sleeping kid even though the bus was moving. But my tote bag got caught on the seat (or Tanning Bed grabbed it?) because it spilled. Pens and pencils rolled everywhere. My notebook flew down the aisle. One drumstick went under Tanning Bed’s seat. I didn’t see where the other one ended up.

I went straight for my notebook, since Steve and Rob, two boys in my grade, were reading it. I wanted to die: it was an embarrassing bit. But thank goodness they didn’t laugh. Steve even picked it up for me and said he was sorry I tumped my stuff over. (I’m not sure what “tumped” means. I guess it’s one of his Texas words. Probably means “dropped.”) He asked if I needed help. (When I asked if they’d seen my drumstick, Rob asked me what it looked like. Steve hit him on the back of the head and called him an idiot.) They didn’t find it.

Tanning Bed held up the other stick and yelled my name.

Jocelyn and Kimberley said, “Whoops!” at the same time.
I put everything into my tote and walked up to Ms. Silver. Before she had a chance to yell at me to sit down, I told her I couldn’t find my other stick.

So she screamed into the intercom (Why? The whole point of an intercom is so you don’t have to scream!): “Attention: Anna Finnegan has lost her drumstick. Everyone look under your seat.”

(I think I started blushing then, but I’m probably just being paranoid. Right?)

Only half the people looked. The little boy sitting behind Ms. Silver held up my zoo pen with the panda that slides behind a window. No one saw anything else.

Ms. Silver told me that she’d look for it when she swept the bus today, but I had visions of The Annoying Kid or Tanning Bed stealing it—or, even worse, one of the High School Kids.

I just sat down next to a sleeping girl who had been woken up in all the confusion. One of her purple barrettes had come loose. It said “Sunday” on it.

Maybe I’ll ask for a whole bunch of drumsticks for my birthday so I can always have a spare. Here’s what I have so far:

THINGS TO PUT ON MY BIRTHDAY LIST

1. Drumsticks
2. A drum set (in my dreams)
3. A green book bag that ZIPS CLOSED and has my initials stitched on it
4. A wireless keyboard
5. An angora sweater that’s vintage-looking (but NOT because Tanning Bed has one)

6. New glasses frames with rhinestones in the corners. I found them [here](#). They come in lots of different colors, but I want lavender.

7. One of those hats with flaps over the ears

8. Hem’s new CD (comes out next month)

9. Tickets to see Billy Matheny and the Frustrations

10. A scarf with sequins on it (only not too many sequins)
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: Help me if you can, I’m feeling down.
Sent: Monday, August 28, 7:53 p.m.

Cole,

Mom’s taking me to the mall Thursday evening to buy new drumsticks. Can I borrow yours if I need them in band before that? I know we probably won’t need them on the second day, since your dad will probably just keep talking about the rules and stuff, but just in case.

Then, when Mom and I get back from the mall, you and I get to watch (insert drum roll here) FOXBORO (insert cymbal crash here).

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Help me if you can, I’m feeling down.
Sent: Monday, August 28, 8:27 p.m.

Cole,

I cannot believe your dad bought you the Caddisfly DVD and the Guitar Hero game. Now I’m JEALOUS in capital letters.

It’s a little early to be practicing your Guitar Hero victory dance, BTW. My jealous demon-fury will only make me play better than you.
Anna

P.S.: Thanks for letting me borrow your sticks.

P.P.S.: But that won’t make me go easy on you at *Guitar Hero*. (Insert jealous demon-fury, *mwah-ha-ha* laugh here.)

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans@kln.net>
Subject: Hooking up?
Sent: Monday, August 28, 8:33 p.m.

Billie,

When people say “hooking up,” what do they mean exactly? Kissing? More than kissing? Much more than kissing?

Anna
RAINY DAYS AND TUESDAYS ALWAYS GET ME DOWN
Tuesday, August 29, 9:23 p.m.

The only good thing about today was watching the Foxboro DVD. Everything else sucked. Seriously.

I was sitting next to the marimba in the band hall, waiting for Cole so I could bum a pair of sticks. (The bus driver hasn’t found mine. Surprise, surprise.) Billie sat with me for a while, but she had to go put her clarinet together and sit in her section before her dad came out and made us start the warm up (she’s tardy a lot). The room was already full of people clanging their lockers and calling dibs on good music stands. The five other drummers—all guys—were squatting around a drum case, thumping cards onto it. They were playing poker, as usual. Sometimes I wish they would just . . .

Wait. Dad’s calling me.

I SWEAR I’M ADOPTED
Tuesday, August 29, 9:46 p.m.

I am so tired of this house. Dad wanted me to get off the Internet so he could download something for his Cruise Ship game. He’s trying to build his latest one to look like a pirate ship. How exciting.

That reminds me: After Mom and I got back from the mall, she made tacos, and Dad even played Cruise Ship WHILE HE WAS EATING. He must be addicted (to Cruise Ship, not to tacos). I told Mom I didn’t want any tacos because I was going to eat pizza with Cole, but she made me. (“You’re too skinny already.” Gee, thanks, Mom.) Unlike my parents, I passed up the hamburger meat and filled two tortillas with beans and
cheese. I took them to my room to watch that new show where everybody is trying to make a demo tape.

Anyway, like I was saying, I wish the Poker Players would just go away.

Like today before band class: While I was waiting for Cole, I figured I’d go get a Coke from the machine down the hall. (According to the Hanover Middle School Band handbook, we’re not supposed to have drinks in the band hall, but we hide them behind the bass drum.) I was digging in my wallet for quarters when Cole came in. I put my wallet down on my chair (why? why? why?), and we went to his locker to get me some sticks. When I got back, Keith—the king of the Poker Players (the King of Clubs! ha ha!)—was flipping through the pics in my wallet. He found the family portrait from Christmas and held it up. (He was wearing a thick leather bracelet with silver studs on it—oh, and a big buckle on it, too, like something you’d wear on your shoe if you were dressed as a Pilgrim. He must think he’s a rock star. Or a Pilgrim. Or something.) He said I look like a toothpick next to my parents. He said he was surprised my mother just had “Merry Christmas” on her sweatshirt and not the whole “’Twas the night of Christmas and all through the house” poem. (Retard. Everybody knows it’s “’Twas the Night BEFORE Christmas.”) He said even if she did have the poem on her shirt, you still couldn’t read most of it because of her fat rolls.

The Poker Players laughed. I didn’t know what to say. (I SHOULD have told him it’s supposed to be “the night BEFORE Christmas.” Why didn’t I think of that???) I stood there while Cole took the wallet from Keith. He found a pic of himself and said, “Look how much my ears stick out here. Forget about fat rolls. I look like I have cinnamon rolls stuck to the sides of my head.”
They laughed at Cole. Keith told him he looked all right and not to sweat it. Cole gave me back my wallet and sat down to play cards with them. Nobody brought up the pics again.

Maybe they’re not so bad after all, just immature. They’ve done this to me since sixth-grade band.

**ON SECOND THOUGHT**
**Tuesday, August 29, 8:01 p.m.**

I hate them.

**NOW HEAR THIS!**
**Tuesday, August 29, 8:05 p.m.**

I am going to get a good snare part in class.

I am going to buy a drum set.

I am going to gain ten pounds.

I am going to stop shopping at Gap Kids because I’m going to fill out a pair of shorts from the (regular) Gap. I’m not going to hear people whisper, “She’s too skinny.” I’m going to hear them whisper, “She’s too hot.”

Plus, how unfair is it that I have every class with Andrea “More Annoying than a Hangnail You Can’t Bite Off” Ogilvy this year, except for band? I know our school only has, like, two and a half eighth-graders in it, but this is beyond reason.

OK, really, there’s more like sixty eighty-graders. But still.
English will be the worst. Ms. Remington loves Hangnail, you can already tell. When we all had to introduce ourselves to the class and Hangnail said she loved reading Shakespeare, Ms. Remington clapped. Hangnail said her name all loud and clear, too. Instead of just “Andrea Ogilvy,” she was, “AH-ndrea O-GIL-vy.” Then she said, “Ogilvy is a Scottish name. My dad is Scottish,” and Ms. Remington started talking about how much she just looooooooves Edinburgh.

I couldn’t even get through the first day of English without Ms. Remington yelling at me. (Note to Billie: Next time you need to get my attention about something funny in Ms. Remington’s class, tap me on the shoulder or something. Don’t keep hitting me on the head with your notebook until I turn around and yell, “KNOCK IT OFF!” and Ms. Remington writes my name on the board and says, “I will not tolerate these shenanigans in my classroom,” and I whisper, “Thanks a lot,” to you, and Ms. Remington hears me and writes a checkmark by my name. Bonus note to Billie: What does the checkmark mean? What happens if you get two? Or three? Or eight hundred sixty-nine?)
Billie,

Just because your cousin said three checkmarks mean detention doesn’t make it true. That may be the way they do it at the high school, but Ms. Remington’s not at the high school, she’s with us (insert violin music and weeping here). Maybe three checkmarks mean . . . I don’t know, you win a pie or something.

And, yes, I did see how Kilt Girl made a big deal out of getting a lefty desk (good name for Andrea, by the way): “Pardon me, but I need to be sure I get a left-handed desk. Only one in ten people are southpaws, you know. We southpaws are special. Blah blah blah.”

It’s too bad you got assigned to her group for the Fahrenheit 451 project. My group is mostly good. People I like in my group: Steve, April, Karen. People I don’t like in my group: Liam (because he’s one of the Poker Players). The only good thing about Kilt Girl bossing you all out of doing the diorama project is that WE got the diorama project! She’s nutsola to pick the “talk about Ray Bradbury’s life” project. She may have said she thinks you’ll get a better grade with it, but you’ll have to get up and talk in front of everybody. With the diorama, I guess we just have to sit it up there on Ms. Remington’s desk and say, “So, ummm, yeah. Here’s our diorama. The end. OK, who’s next?”
P.S.: Edinburgh is a city in Scotland. Ms. Remington said so when you were hitting me with the notebook and giggling.

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: checkmarks
Sent: Tuesday, August 29, 11:20 p.m.

Billie,

I know you could see Ms. Remington’s bra strap, but you didn’t see me giggling, did you? Even if it was leopard-print.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Hooking Up?
Sent: Tuesday, August 29, 11:22 p.m.

Billie,

If “hooking up” means going all the way, then wouldn’t people just say “going all the way”? I think maybe it’s somewhere between kissing and going all the way. Like maybe
when a boy puts his hand up your shirt. Or maybe it’s that thing everybody says Jocelyn let Matthew do to her under the bleachers (insert boom-shaka-laka music here).

Anna

P.S.: The “embarrassing bit” Steve and Rob saw in my notebook when it fell on the bus was “30 Ways to Tell if a Guy is Into You,” which I’d copied out of Glow. I told you it was embarrassing!

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Hooking Up?
Sent: Wednesday, August 30, 7:10 a.m.

Billie!

I DO NOT have a crush on anybody! Especially not Steve! No, no, no! Just because I posted Steve’s bird quiz doesn’t mean I like him. And writing down “30 Ways to Tell if a Guy is Into You” DOES NOT mean I’m trying to tell if a guy is into me. No way!

Definitely not!

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: Chair tests?
Sent: Wednesday, August 30, 12:16 a.m.
Cole,

Do you know when your dad is having the first chair test? If it’s coming up, we should practice together. You can help me with xylophone. I can read rhythms fine, but I can never remember what the different notes are. I want to do well so I can beat the Poker Players. They deserve it, don’t you think?

It was fun watching Foxboro with you. You’re right—it would be awesome to be a drummer in their band. Such fun music to play, since they have electric guitar and tuba and piano and accordion and harmonica. And they’d be cool to hang out with.

Sorry I had to leave in the middle of it to come home. I know Mom wanted me to clean the birds’ room today, but I can’t believe she kept calling my cell. I mean, she knew we’d be watching a concert DVD, and obviously I would have my phone on silent—that’s just being courteous to the other person watching it with you. She didn’t have to go and call your home phone like that and tell your dad to send me back.

If I were in the movie theater and I had my phone on silent, would she call up the management and tell them to send me back? I think not.

Anyway, blah blah blah. We’ll have to finish the DVD some other time, right before I beat you at Guitar Hero AGAIN.

Oh, and BTW, I think you would be a great cinematographer. Don’t listen to Billie. She’s just trying to get on your nerves. She didn’t mean it when she said you were “too nice” to be a cinematographer (whatever that means). Next time she says it, just tell her she’s too mean to be a handbag designer.
Cole,

It’s a deal: I’ll help you with snare if you help me with xylophone. Don’t worry about messing up your flamadiddles, because I’m pretty much the best flamadiddler in the world. If we’re only going to have two weeks to practice after your dad announces the test, and if he’s going to announce the test tomorrow, then we should get to work.

About finishing the DVD: Friday sounds great.

Ohmigod, I just noticed the time. Gotta catch the bus. Bye!

Anna
ALL OF YOU SHOULD TAKE THIS QUIZ, TOO, AND POST YOUR RESULTS
Wednesday, August 30, 7:45 a.m.

1. *What time is it?* 7:32 a.m. I’m in Mr. Martin’s office in the band hall. He said I could check my e-mail.

2. *What’s your full name?* Anna Marie Finnegan.

3. *What are you most afraid of?* I don’t know, clowns are pretty creepy.

4. *What is the most recent concert you’ve been to?* I’ve never been to a real concert—just our band concerts for school. I DID watch a Foxboro concert on DVD yesterday, though. (Thanks, Cole!)

5. *Place of birth?* Morgantown, WV.


8. *What color is your bedroom carpet?* A horrible green—not even a solid green. It has patches of forest green and patches of pea green.

9. *Ever been to Alaska?* No.

10. *From whom did you get your last email?* Cole. We were talking about practicing together.

11. *Ever been TPing?* No.

12. *Croutons or bacon bits?* Croutons (since I don’t eat meat).


15. *Favorite color of lipstick?* Ummm, I’ll say lip-colored?

16. *Favorite color of eye shadow?* Eyelid-colored???

17. *Favorite ice cream?* Mint chocolate chip. (This quiz is boring.)
18. Ever been on a ship? Bite me. (Really, really boring.)


20. What do you do most often when you're bored? Robots don’t get bored. They just go into stand-by mode.

21. Bedtime? I usually put myself on the battery charger around 2:00 a.m.

22. Who will respond to this email the quickest? Let me run a quick calculation in my robot super-brain: BZZZ . . . BZZZ . . . BZZZ. OK, odds are: Billie.

23. Who is the person you sent this to that is least likely to respond? BZZZ . . . BZZZ . . . BZZZ: Steve.

24. Favorite TV show? That infomercial for the robot vacuum cleaner. He is so hot!

25. Ford or Chevy? BZZZ . . . BZZZ . . . BZZZ. Error! Error! Does not compute!

26. What are you listening to right now? The hum of electricity in my circuits and wires.

27. How many tattoos do you have? One. My serial number is tattooed on my ankle.

28. How many pets do you have? Two. A graphing calculator named Daisy and an electric toothbrush named Fred.

29. Favorite article of clothing? Robots are nudists.

30. What would you like to accomplish before you die? Robots don’t die. Their parts just stop working.

CLEARLY I'M A GENIUS
Wednesday, August 30, 4:14 p.m.

Went into the band hall before school today and practiced on the snare. The only other people there were three trumpets goofing off. I moved the hi-hat cymbal and the
tom-tom next to the snare, and it was sort of like a drum set, I guess. I tried to do the drum part for one of Foxboro’s songs (“Georgia,” track #8 from *This is Your Pilot Speaking*), and you could kind of tell what I was playing, even without the bass part and all the other stuff. That’s a good sign, right?

Also: I read online that when actors gain weight for a role, they eat steak and bread a lot. I won’t eat steak, but I love bread. I’m going to make a lot of buttery toast right now, before Mom gets home and asks me what I’m up to. And I’ll make some coffee. Oh, and some pasta. With butter on it.

*CLEARLY I'M RETARDED*

*Wednesday, August 30, 6:17 p.m.*

I think I’m going to throw up.
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: track numbers
Sent: Wednesday, August 30, 8:35 p.m.

Billie,

I don’t know how I can remember what the track numbers are for my Foxboro CDs. I just listen to them so much, I guess. And I don’t know why you think they’re such a weird band. I mean, they’re cool-weird, not stupid-weird. I like that have an accordion and a harmonica and stuff. It makes them sound unique.

Anna
I HOPE MR. TAYLOR’S QUIZ TOMORROW WILL BE THIS FUN AND EASY (BUT I DOUBT IT)

Thursday, August 31, 7:24 a.m.

Well, I’m so impressed with your survey answers that I’m going to post them here, in the order they were added to my “Comments” page. That way, people won’t have to click on the “Comments” link to read them and I can mess with the fonts, which is much more fun than studying for Taylor’s quiz:

Steve’s Answers:

1. What time is it? 3:15. the first to respond! ha ha!

2. What’s your full name? steven james broussard

3. What are you most afraid of? snakes, i guess

4. What is the most recent concert you’ve been to? i saw one in austin, tx. it was right before i moved here. that would have been . . . ummm . . . 2 years ago.

5. Place of birth? beaumont, tx

6. Favorite food? pizza

7. What’s your hair color? black

8. What color is your bedroom carpet? no carpet. we have wood and marble floors in our house

9. Ever been to Alaska? yes. my family went on a cruise there 3 years ago. it was awesome.

10. Before this one, from whom did you get your last email? my cousin lynn. she is a scientist in the arctic. she sent me a pic of a polar bear.
11. Ever been TPing? no
12. Croutons or bacon bits? bacon bits
13. Favorite restaurant? the buffet at grand casino coushatta. it has every kind of food you can imagine.
17. Favorite ice cream? chocolate
18. Ever been on a ship? yes. the cruise ship in alaska
20. What do you do most often when you're bored? play xbox 360
22. Who will respond to this email the quickest? not sure
23. Who is the person you sent this to that is least likely to respond? not sure
24. Favorite TV show? csi
25. Ford or Chevy? chevy all the way (what my man tony stewart drives)
26. What are you listening to right now? the burglar alarm. dad set it off again on accident.
27. How many tattoos do you have? none. when I turn 18, i want to get a deer tattoo on my arm.

Billie’s Answers:
1. What time is it? 6:30
2. What’s your full name? billie eleanora martin . . . *eye roll* . . . i hate my name . . . it’s an old-person name
3. What are you most afraid of? the orthodontist . . . i hate getting my braces tightened!!!
4. What is the most recent concert you've been to? The Wheeling Symphony Orchestra... Dad made Cole and me go... *another eye roll*

5. Place of birth? Clarksburg, W.V.

6. Favorite food? Pasta

7. What's your hair color? Caramel blonde... I want to dye it auburn

8. What color is your bedroom carpet? Beige, but I spilled an orange pop in front of the TV, so it's orange right there

9. Ever been to Alaska? No... but that sounds like fun

10. Before this one, from whom did you get your last email? Andrea... giving orders about our English project... she wants me to talk about "Ray Bradbury's other books"... *snore*

11. Ever been TPing? Yes... Cole's bedroom!... it was revenge. After he TPed my room, and I got in trouble with Dad for it even though Cole didn't!

12. Croutons or bacon bits? Bacon bits

13. Favorite restaurant? Olive Garden

14. Favorite flower? White rose

15. Favorite color of lipstick? Cover Girl's Golden Apricot

16. Favorite color of eye shadow? Clinique's Sierra Glaze

17. Favorite ice cream? Cherry

18. Ever been on a ship? No... just a canoe
19. Been in love with someone? not yet . . . (to anna: i think ur in love . . . with YOU-KNOW-WHO!!! . . . <3 )

20. What do you do most often when you’re bored? watch tv

21. Bedtime? whenever . . . dad never really checks on us to make sure we’re in bed

22. Who will respond to this email the quickest? cole . . . to bug me about it

23. Who is the person you sent this to that is least likely to respond? anna . . . she already did this quiz

24. Favorite TV show? project runway

25. Ford or Chevy? jaguar

26. What are you listening to right now? “all about u and me” by trisha

27. How many tattoos do you have? zero, but when i’m older, i want to get a picture of my mom tattooed on my shoulder blade . . . that way, even though she’s passed on, i can still remember her

28. How many pets do you have? a beta fish named sunny

29. What would you like to accomplish before you die? lots of things . . . go to paris . . . go to london . . . design my own line of handbags . . . get married in an old stone castel, like i’m the queen of england . . . have twin daughters named tereza and tamarind . . . be happy!

Cole’s Answers:

1. What time is it? 7.11 PM. Dad made Billie go practice her clarinet, so i get to use the computer finally.
2. What's your full name? **Cole Albert Martin.** I was named after Cole Porter, Dad's favorite composer. Billie was named after Billie Holiday, Mom’s favorite singer.

3. What are you most afraid of? **Heights.**

4. What is the most recent concert you've been to? **The weekend before school started, Keith, Liam, and I heard a band at the Purple Fiddle.**

5. Place of birth? **Clarksburg, WV.**

6. Favorite food? **Corndogs, but only the carnival kind, not the freezer kind.**

7. What's your hair color? **Brown.**

8. What color is your bedroom carpet? **My floor is concrete (since Dad let me turn the basement into my bedroom). I have a big, blue rug though.**

9. Ever been to Alaska? **Nope. Too cold.**

10. Before this one, from whom did you get your last email? **Anna, about having practices.**

11. Ever been TPing? **Yes. Billie’s room. And Billie hardly got in any trouble at all. Just a talking-to, like, “I don’t care who started it, Billie Eleanor Martin. You made the bigger mess, and apparently you’re not sorry, so you should clean it up.” It was no big deal.**

12. Croutons or bacon bits? **Both.**


14. Favorite flower? -----  

15. Favorite color of lipstick? -----
16. Favorite color of eye shadow? -----


18. Ever been on a ship? Just a white-water raft once and canoes lots of times. (And Billie usually spends more time out of the canoe than in it. She’s good at flipping over.)


20. What do you do most often when you’re bored? Watch TV. Play some PlayStation.

21. Bedtime? I don’t really have a bedtime.

22. Who will respond to this email the quickest? Pretty much everyone has responded.

23. Who is the person you sent this to that is least likely to respond? Pretty much everyone has responded.


25. Ford or Chevy? Either one.

26. What are you listening to right now? “Hearts on Fire” by Foxboro.

27. How many tattoos do you have? None. What if I got tired of it?

28. How many pets do you have? None.

29. What would you like to accomplish before you die? Be a professional percussionist, or a cinematographer, or both.
Billie,

Why didn’t Cole tell me about going to the Purple Fiddle? Why’d he go with Keith and Liam? They don’t know anything about music. They don’t know anything about anything.

Anna

Billie,

Oh, if it was a last-minute thing, then no, I guess it wouldn’t make sense for him to call me first. But why didn’t he mention it afterward, like, “Hey, Anna, I went to the Purple Fiddle with two of the mean, sucky, no-talent Poker Players whose faces you’d like to bash in”? I mean, it’s one thing for him to play cards with them in band class, but I didn’t know they were doing stuff outside of class now. That’s totally different.

You don’t think he’s mad at me or something, do you?
Billie,

Well, obviously Cole doesn’t have to tell me *everything* about his life. What a silly question.

I know he doesn’t have a reason to be mad at me. I’m just saying.

And I’m not “worried” about him being mad at me. If I were “worried,” then I *would* just ask him about it, thank you very much. I’m just . . . curious.

Anyway, let’s change the subject: I really don’t think you have an old-lady name at all. You shouldn’t change it. If you did, your mom would probably start haunting you and making Billie Holiday songs get stuck in your head all day until you changed it back. Oh!

But maybe you could go by your middle name, Eleanora.

Anna
Fine, if Eleanora still sounds too old, then go by Elli. Or spell Billie with an i instead of an ie, I don’t know. This is just like the time you asked me if you should wear the white shoes or the red shoes, and I said the white ones, but then you wore the red ones anyway because you said I “dressed boring” and “I was no expert,” and then I said, “Why do you keep asking for my opinion if I dress boring? Go ask somebody else,” and you said, “Maybe I will,” and I said, “Fine,” and you said, “Fine,” and then we didn’t speak to each other until the next morning when I bought you a brownie from the vending machine and you didn’t even complain that it was the brownie with the nuts on it, even though you don’t like nuts, because I hadn’t meant to buy the nut brownie, I just hit the wrong button.

Anna

P.S.: Sorry I said your mother might haunt you. I didn’t mean to make you so upset.
QUESTION
Thursday, August 31, 5:11 p.m.

I caught another glimpse of Keith’s Pilgrim/rock-star bracelet in class today, and I realized it had something stamped into it: KW–AO. What does that mean? Is it a designer?

QUESTION (PART 2)
Thursday, August 31, 5:52 p.m.

Is it a store brand?

QUESTION (PART 3)
Thursday, August 31, 3:56 p.m.

Is it a warning label? “Keep Well Away from Others”? “Keith’s Weird And Obnoxious”? “Keith Walter’s An Oddball”?

Oh right! That’s his initials: K. W.

But what does A. O. stand for?

OHMIGOD!
Thursday, August 31, 6:05 p.m.

Cole just called me and said that “A. O.” probably stands for “Andrea Ogilvy,” since Keith and Andrea have been seeing movies together (!) and going to each other’s houses (!!!) and, according to Keith, “hooking up” (!!!!!).

If Andrea “I Heart Keith” Ogilvy took the survey, it would look like this:
1. **What time is it?** 9:00 P.M. I just got home from my date with Keith. He is SO CUTE! He is such a gentleman. He even gave me a rose! @}-->-- Blah blah blah. Now I’m going to put my hair in curlers and paint my nails and tie jingle bells to my shoelaces so I can look cute when he sees me tomorrow.

2. **What's your full name?** Andrea “I Heart Keith” Ogilvy.

3. **What are you most afraid of?** Someone asking me what happens in a Shakespeare play, since I’ve never really read one.

4. **What is the most recent concert you’ve been to?** Whenever someone tells me how cool I am for being left-handed, it’s like music to my ears, so it might as well be a concert.

5. **Place of birth?** Mars.

6. **Favorite food?** Anything Scottish.

7. **What's your hair color?** Fake.

8. **What color is your bedroom carpet?** Smith College’s official colors.

9. **Ever been to Alaska?** No, but if Ms. Remington says she likes Alaska, I’m totally going to say I have.

10. **From whom did you get your last email?** Jocelyn, telling me how wonderful I am.

11. **Ever been TPing?** No. I just make rude comments to people instead.

12. **Croutons or bacon bits?** Whichever is more popular in Scotland.

13. **Favorite restaurant?** Ye Olde and Snooty Scottish Place.

14. **Favorite flower?** Venus flytrap.

15. **Favorite color of lipstick?** Kiss-My-Butt Coral.

Gotta go. Mom’s home. Going to the mall! New sticks!!!

**DO YOU HAVE AN ANGER PROBLEM?**
**Thursday, August 31, 7:34 p.m.**

Proof that I am “really reasonable”:

REALLY REASONABLE: You are 35 percent ANGRY and 65 percent PEACEFUL. That makes your anger style REALLY REASONABLE. Mellow, but not so laid-back that you can’t take action. You stick to your guns, but you’re open to new ideas.

**IN YOUR FACE, MOM!!!**
**Thursday, August 31, 7:36 p.m.**

I should forward Mom those fantabulous “really reasonable” quiz results. Keep reading:

We were halfway to the mall to buy my sticks. Mom made me take off my earphones to tell me I didn’t eat any meat in my tacos the other night. Like I didn’t know this already.

So I told her, for like the eighty-ninth time, that I’m a vegetarian now. Like SHE didn’t know THAT already.

She said she was worried I wasn’t getting enough protein, and I said beans are protein, which they are. (I’m only thirteen, and even I know that from health class.) Then I put on my earphones again. She started making her “I hope this vegetarian thing is
temporary” speech. I turned up Jenny Lewis and the Watson Twins and acted like I couldn’t hear her.

(One day I’m going to give her my “I hope this nagging thing is temporary” speech.)

Guess what she did! She pulled the earphone out of my left ear and said she thought I had an anger problem.

Well, I DON’T have an anger problem, but shopping with Mom today would have made anybody get one. All I wanted to do was get my sticks and go to Penney’s so I could look at the angora sweaters, but she couldn’t pass a store without going in. Bought so many things I had to help carry. And she wore her loud high heels (of course).

Turns out Penney’s was the only store where Mom could walk quietly. It had carpeted parts. But even Penney’s sucked. I had just tried on an angora sweater with a beaded daisy on it when Mom tried one on, too. She bought us each one. Nice, I guess. But what if she wants us to wear them on the same day? Can you imagine? At least they’re not the same color: mine’s blue and hers is pink.

The sequin scarves looked good, too, but I was afraid Mom might get more ideas. When she went to Victoria’s Secret, I escaped to look at the drum set in the window of the music store. What’s next? Matching bras?

(The drum set is shiny and red, like one of the cars in the racecar ride at the carnival. If I stand at just the right spot in front of the window, I can see my reflection in the glass, and it looks like I’m standing behind the drum set—like it’s my drum set.)

I dropped by Sam Goody, which was really busy today. I squeezed over to the Listening Wall, but all of the headphones were taken, so I milled around. That’s when I
saw a girl looking at a DVD that was (I’m pretty sure) *The Sound of Music*. And the girl was Jordan. You know, from the bus stop.

WTH!

Ms. MacDougal made us watch *The Sound of Music* in music class last year, and it was all singing and skipping and smiling cheesy smiles and goat puppets. GOAT PUPPETS!

I never would have thought Jordan would buy that kind of movie. (And she did buy it. I saw her.) I mean, someone who calls me Banana Finnegan? Like I could ever see her swirling around the mountains in her turquoise jewelry and her cowboy boots: “The buuuuuus stop’s aliiiiiiiive . . . with the soooood . . . of liiiiiighters.” (OK, that’s the cheesy kind of joke Mr. Martin would tell, but you get the idea.)

Mom came to get me later. She asked what I was listening to, and when I said Foxboro, she was all, “Of course. Foxboro.”

Puh-lease! Mom’s always playing the Carpenters when she’s fixing up the bird room, and who says “Of course” to her? Nobody.

Oh well. At least I got my sticks. Turquoise, size 7As. Thin like pencils. Now I feel like a real percussionist. They’re so light, they feel like nothing. We’re supposed to use size 5A in class, so I’ll have make sure Mr. Martin doesn’t notice they’re thinner than everyone else’s. (Insert *Mission: Impossible* theme song here.)

**WHAT FABRIC ARE YOU?**

*Thursday, August 31, 8:40 p.m.*

This quiz was weird:
“Strong, durable, and comfy, you are tried-and-true denim. While other fabrics wrinkle or rip under pressure, you get through trials without damage. The normal wear-and-tear of life just softens you and makes you more treasured. A good fit for people of all shapes and sizes.”

**WHAT FLAVOR OF KISSES DO YOU GIVE?**
*Thursday, August 31, 8:45 p.m.*

My results from this other crazy quiz:

“You give MILK-CHOCOLATE kisses. Not too sweet and not too rich, your kisses are versatile. Pleasing to any palette during any meal. Soft yet firm, cozy yet fun. Recommended pairing: a picnic by the lake, a bicycling trip through the park, or an evening of watching movies at home.”
Billie,

OK, so that quiz said that your “pictante” kisses are “muy caliente” and “guaranteed to get hearts racing.” But guys aren’t always in the mood for something that’s “hot, hot, hot.” Sometimes they want something that’s “cozy yet fun.” Sometimes guys want a “bicycling trip through the park” instead of “a night of salsa dancing.”

And what do you mean I can’t take the quiz since I’ve never kissed anybody? You haven’t kissed anybody either and you took the quiz. And don’t tell me about the time you kissed Ted Caruthers in fifth grade because that doesn’t count.

Anna
TV FAMILIES ARE FAKESTER THAN ANDREA’S STRIKE-YOU-BLIND SHINY HAIR

Friday, September 1, 12:36 a.m.

You know how on sitcoms, whenever a couple wants to have a fight, they go in the kitchen to keep people in the living room from hearing, even if the kitchen door is one that swings instead of really shutting?

That would never work in real life.

SECOND OPINION
Friday, September 1, 1:56 a.m.

Doesn’t anyone else think Andrea “Doesn’t Deserve a Boyfriend” Ogilvy wears hair extensions?

Should I go out there right now and give Mom back my sweater to return it, or should I wait for her to ask me?

Could I wire Sassafras’s beak shut without hurting him (visibly)?

Is anyone in Hanover awake right now besides me and my stupid family?

SLEEP
Friday, September 1, 3:26 a.m.

So tired. Typing fast. Harder to see what I’m doing. Spots bursting everywhere. Should I return the sweater?

Someone is calling me. BRB.
Just checked the house. Everyone is asleep now but me. Even the birds. No one is callin me.

Schizo?
Dear Billie,

Too bad you were out sick today, because I wanted to tell you about last night. But thanks for your “cheer up” e-card.

My parents were fighting over the sweater.

Over me.

They kept me up for so long that I started seeing shapes in my sponge-painted walls. (Once I thought I saw a hula dancer.) I thought, “So this is what it feels like when you die. Your mind goes first and then your body.” Then an even scarier thought popped into my head: “What if I’m already dead and I just don’t know it?”

Why do people think of stuff like that anyway? Am I the only one who thinks these things? Maybe I am schizophrenic.

Should I find a quiz that tells you if you’re schizophrenic?

My parents’ fight started in their bedroom, but it ended up in the kitchen. I could hear a lot of it, even though our kitchen has a door that doesn’t just swing, it really closes. I could hear Mom: “Blah blah blah—treating me like a child—blah blah blah—my money—blah blah blah—I saw this thing on TV—blah blah blah—quality time with Anna.”

Dad said, louder, “It’s our money. Why buy two tacky sweaters that shed like cats?”
In the bird room, Sassafras said, “Birds suddenly appear.” (I guess Mom’s teaching him Carpenters’ songs now.)

Back in the kitchen, Mom yelled, “Because I wanted to buy my only daughter—our only daughter—something nice.”

The way Mom said “our only daughter” made my stomach flip. I took out my practice pad and my 7As and started practicing paradiddles. I kept thinking about how I was the one who picked out the sweaters, how I knew they were expensive when I first saw them. I kept drumming louder and faster until the banging filled my whole head with noise. Wonderful noise, like horses running.

Sassafras started squawking loud, so I gave up.

What should I do?

Anna

To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
Subject: RE: sweater
Sent: Friday, September 1, 5:02 p.m.

Billie,

But if I make a big hole in the sweater so the Penney’s people won’t take it back, then I won’t be able to wear it anyway, on account of the hole. And if I make a hole that’s small enough for me to still wear it, then the Penney’s people will take it back. There’s no way I can get the hole to be just the right size. (This sounds like a job for Goldilocks.)
Anyway, I’m not doing it. I’ll just hide the sweater in my cedar trunk and forget about it.

Anna

To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
Subject: THIS HOLE IS OUT OF CONTROL!!!!!!!!!!
Sent: Friday, September 1, 6:18 p.m.

BACK UNDER CONTROL
Friday, September 1, 8:22 p.m.

You should have seen me a few hours ago. I was trying to cut a tiny-but-not-too-tiny hole in my angora sweater (don’t ask—it’s a long story), only the hole kept getting bigger and bigger. It was near the very bottom of the sweater, just above my right hip. But Billie came over with her sewing basket, and she had the fantastic idea to sew a patch over it, only it wasn’t a hobo-type patch. It was this little square of silky fabric with swirly, colorful shapes that matched the blue sweater (the shapes looked kind of like big, fat commas). She also had a scripty, curly-wurly A made out of gold thread, and she sewed that onto the patch (A stands for Anna). Now the sweater is even cooler than before. It’s funky, and it’s kind of retro, too, like the L sweater Laverne wore on Laverne and Shirley. Can’t wait to wear it. If you’re reading this, Billie—thanks!

THIS JUST IN
Friday, September 1, 10:35 p.m.

I just found out (from Billie) that the “comma” pattern is called “paisley.” She got the paisley from her mom’s old basket of fabric. It’s the same paisley her Mom used to make a dress for her—and she let Billie help make it.

Also: Billie took the gold A off of a pillowcase she made that said “ASLEEP.” Now it just says “SLEEP,” but Billie says that’s OK because now it’s like the pillow is telling her to GO TO SLEEP, so maybe she’ll get to bed earlier.

Billie is a wonderful, cashmere-socks, spoonful-of-cookie-dough kind of friend, so I’m going to start calling her Elli, which she’s been asking me to do, only I wouldn’t until
now because I didn’t think there was anything wrong with her real name (still don’t).

Anyway, thanks again, Billie (oops, I mean Elli)!

**FOURTEEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST**
*Monday, September 4, 4:54 p.m.*

Today Mr. Martin announced that we’ll be having chair tests in two weeks. He passed out the music we’ll have to learn for it, called “Lament.” Percussionists have to learn the snare and xylophone parts.

He also passed out a piece of music called “Sagebrush and Cacti” for us to start learning in class. The Poker Players jumped on all the decent instruments—snare, cymbals, bells, chimes, and temple blocks—and Cole got the timpani part.

Guess what I got stuck with. The triangle. That’s right. I had one note to play in the whole thing: a ding at the very beginning. What a rip-off.

So far it looks like this year will be the same as last year. I’ll keep getting stuck playing something stupid like tambourine or slide whistle on everything. That’s why I have to do well on this chair test. It’s like a competition on a reality show. The better you do, the higher you’re ranked. First chair is best and seventh chair is worst. If you’re first chair, you get to hand out the parts to people because you’re section leader. The higher you’re ranked, the better the parts you’re likely to be given (in theory).

Last year—and until the new chair test, I guess—we were ranked like this:

1. Keith: in the dogs-playing-poker painting, he’d be a pit bull wearing a spiky collar
2. Liam, the Chihuahua: the scrawny Poker Player who’s always spazzing out and drumming on random objects

3. Cole

4. Me

5. Mitch, the bulldog: he’s got a shaved head, and I’ve never seen him smile

6. Timothy, the collie: he has long, red, shampoo-model hair

7. Jay, the St. Bernard: he’s a big, big guy

The thing is, even though I’m not last chair, I still got stuck with triangle on “Sagebrush and Cacti,” so maybe the chairs don’t matter. The Pit Bull keeps giving the good parts to his buddies. Maybe the only reason Cole got the (good) timpani part is because he is a guy, and the Poker Players are guys, and they live by a top-secret guy-friend code.

Of course, on the plus side, playing triangle means I get to goof off for most of the class while Mr. Martin yells “embouchures!” (his favorite word) and makes people replay parts they messed up. So I get a chance to do other things, like listen to my MP3 player or read *Glow*.

It still kind of sucks, though.

I have GOT to do well on that chair test. I’m going to practice right now.

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**I SUCK (STILL FOURTEEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**

*Monday, September 4, 8:46 p.m.*

I’m in a (slightly) better mood.
I shouldn’t have said that Cole got the timpani part because he’s all Mafia-tastic buddy-buddy with the Poker Players. The truth is he flat-out rocks at timpani. If you’re reading this, Cole, sorry for being snarky then. I was in a bad mood. Also: Mom and Dad were fighting in the kitchen again when I wrote that. If I’d have been wearing Mom’s old mood ring, it wouldn’t have just turned red. It would have burst into flames I was so mad.

I was practicing snare in my room a little bit ago, but Dad stopped fighting with Mom long enough to yell that I was being loud. So I drummed on my practice pad instead, but it’s not the same. It’s like drumming on a car tire.

Moo (Thirteen Days Till Chair Test)
Tuesday, September 5, 6:25 p.m.

My mother just spent $204 to buy sixty-eight frozen steaks from a door-to-door salesman. Bacon-wrapped filet mignon. New York Strip. It’s all there.

My dad’s going to have a Yosemite Sam cuss-fit when he gets home.

She made me help her put it all in the freezer. We had to cram it in. I asked her why she bought it, and she said she felt sorry for the guy having to sell steaks when it’s storming outside. Then she said it was a good deal, like paying three bucks for each steak. I told her that it was disgusting to open the freezer and see a big pile of raw meat in little clear packets. She called me sanctimonious. I’m not sure what “sanctimonious” means, but it can’t be good.

Wait, I’m going to look up “sanctimonious” right now . . .

What! I am so not sanctimonious. If anyone is sanctimonious, it’s her, not me.
UPDATE (STILL THIRTEEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Tuesday, September 5, 10:04 p.m.

Dad came home a little while ago and got so mad about the steaks that he told Mom she had to return them to the salesman. Mom said the salesman wouldn’t take them back, and Dad said he’d darn well better. Now Dad’s playing Attack! on the computer—it’s like Cruise Ship, only instead of building ships, you build up armies and make them fight each other—and Mom’s in the birds’ room, hammering.

I’VE BEEN SNARED! (TWELVE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Wednesday, September 6, 7:15 p.m.

Get this.

The Poker Players let me play snare on a song today, called “Soldier’s Retreat.” But it’s just a few tappity-taps with a bunch of rests. There are so many rests I have to count them on my fingers and mumble, “One-two-three-four, two-two-three-four,” to remember where we are.

It was the only percussion part in the song. All the guys sat around and played some new card game that Keith made up. I couldn’t figure out the rules, but every once in a while, one of them would yell “Haymaker!” and slap the snare case. One time Liam got so excited that he almost kicked over the water bottle he’d hidden behind the bass drum. After Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Martin’s assistant, yelled at them to be quiet and Mr. Martin said he was tired of them being so “apparently disrespectful,” they whispered “Haymaker” and just tapped it instead.
NOW I HAVE “SOLDIER’S RETREAT” STUCK IN MY HEAD . . . (STILL TWELVE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Wednesday, September 6, 7:22 p.m.

. . . so I feel like I’m trapped in one of those Civil War documentaries Ms. Kendall makes us watch in history.
Cole,

Wow! And your dad is THE BAND DIRECTOR! I can’t imagine him yelling at you for playing too loud. That means there’s no hope for any of us.

So, this place you and Billie found for us to practice: Are you sure the house is abandoned? I guess I’ll go with you tomorrow if you’re absolutely positively sure it’s abandoned. But I don’t want to be in there playing “Lament” and have some hillbilly coon-skin-cap guy walk in with a shotgun and say (insert banjo plinkety-plink music here), “What in tarnation are you doing on my property?”

Anna
GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS (ELEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Thursday, September 7, 3:45 p.m.

First the bad news: I wore my angora sweater to school today and the Andrea “Bug-Eyes” Ogilvy said, “Nice sweater.” Only it didn’t sound like a compliment.

Now the good news: I had to sit next to Jordan today. She listened to her MP3 player most of the time and didn’t say a word to me. (Hooray!) When she got off at the high school, she left the player behind. And I HAVE IT.

Bye for now. Elli and Cole are waiting for me in the living room while I’m typing this. I need to be putting on my shoes.

IF GARLIC KEEPS VAMPIRES AWAY, WHAT KEEPS REGULAR OLD GHOSTS AWAY?
(STILL ELEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Thursday, September 7, 6:45 p.m.

Ended up wearing my plain sneakers to go with Elli and Cole. I could only find one of my suedes. Anyway . . .

We went to the abandoned house this afternoon. So horror-movie looking: boards over some windows, tiny trees growing in the gutter. There were cigarette butts on the ground, which made me think people might live there, but Elli and Cole said no. The cigarettes had been there before.

Cole, Elli, and I took turns carrying his old snare kit all the way there, so it felt really good to get inside and put it down. We found a closet we’re going to keep it in.

No furniture in the house. In the living room, there was an ax propped against the fireplace and an old coffee can on the mantle. That’s it.
Elli looked in the coffee can. Whoever used to live here used it to spit tobacco in. Elli told me to look in too, but no way.

We took turns listening to Jordan’s MP3 player. Billie may think Foxboro makes weird music, but this was really weird music. Not “weird” weird. “Old-timey” weird. I think all the songs are from musicals: “Singin’ in the Rain,” “I Feel Pretty,” “Doe a Deer” (from *The Sound of Music*), “Rhapsody in Blue” (that one didn’t have any words).

Cole and I practiced snare for a couple hours. I have a fourth of the part down.

Elli brought her clarinet along, but she didn’t play it. She just kept looking around the house and talking about what she wanted to be for the Literature Dance. Oh, right, forgot to mention that: Somebody’s religious parents—the teachers won’t tell us who because that’s “confidential”—mailed a letter to Principal Radcliff, saying that the Halloween Dance is evil. So Principal Radcliff put Ms. Remington in charge of coming up with a new kind of non-Halloween dance, and now we all have to dress like characters from literature. Ms. Remington said that we should pick characters who are “close to our heart” and “with whom we share an affinity.” But what if somebody “shares an affinity” with Dracula? He’s literary AND evil. Or what if somebody goes as one of the book burners in *Fahrenheit 451*? Ms. Remington would think that a book burner was super evil.

Ohmigosh, I should *so* go as a book burner. You heard it here first. I’ve got dibs on book burner!

BTW, Elli wants to go as Paris Hilton because Paris Hilton is in magazines all the time, and magazines should count as “literature” because, according to the dictionary, “literature” can just mean “printed material.” Cole wants to go as a marine biologist,
since that’s what he wants his career to be now, instead of a cinematographer, so we’re
going to try to find a novel/play/poem about a marine biologist. I’m not sure what a
marine biologist looks like, though. Like, maybe Cole should wrap himself in seaweed
and a bunch of seashells from Elli’s handbag-making supplies.

**WHAT COFFEE ARE YOU? (STILL ELEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**
**Thursday, September 7, 7:22 p.m.**

Cole just called. I’m going to his house to beat him at *Guitar Hero* and finish
watching Foxboro. But first I wanted to post this:

“You are café au lait. Mild, agreeable, and comforting. Strong but smooth. A
balanced person.”

Coffee with milk! Ha!

(Click [here](#) to take this quiz.)

P.S.: When I opened the freezer to get some ice a little while ago, steaks fell
everywhere. I’m talking avalanche. I hope Mom convinces the salesman to take them
back already.

**JORDAN MUST BE CRAZY (STILL ELEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**
**Thursday, September 7, 10:04 p.m.**

I was watching Foxboro in Cole’s living room when I saw that his dad had *Singin’ in
the Rain*. Cole put the DVD in and flipped to the scene where the guy (Gene Kelly,
according to this film info Web site) sings “Singin’ in the Rain.” He’s twirling around
with an umbrella and tap-dancing in puddles. One time, he even sits under a drainpipe and lets the water fall on his head. How could anyone like this?

I did record part of the song “Good Morning” (also from Singin’ in the Rain) for my voicemail message on my cell phone, though. It’s kind of funny—not ha-ha funny but people-are-so-freaking-weird funny.

I also change Cole’s name in my phonebook to “Oklahoma!” (which is another musical his dad has on DVD). Cole got his cell and changed my name to “Music Man” (another one). Then we both changed Billie/Elli’s name to “Paris Hilton,” just because.
Elli,

I DO NOT want to get Steve to like me, even if he has been to Alaska, and even if Karen says he’s been to a bunch of other places, too. What do I care if he’s going to Mexico next summer? It’s not like I want to go to Mexico. And how does Karen know?

Anyway, I’m not so sure about your flirting tips. If I put on lipstick in front of him, I would look ridiculous because I never wear lipstick normally. And how can I “ask him for help”? Should I, like, tie myself to the train tracks or what?

Anna

P.S.: No, I have not “found my suede sneaker.” Tell me where you hid it. I’m being serious. I know it’s in here somewhere. The only thing big enough to carry it out in was the drum case, and it wasn’t in there.
I WISH YOU COULD HAVE BEEN THERE (TEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Friday, September 8, 10:37 a.m.

Jordan is SO AWESOME. I’m typing this in Mr. Taylor’s class so I don’t forget it, but I’ve got to type fast because the bell’s gonna ring soon.

Gave Jordan back her MP3 this morning. The Annoying Kid (Kyle) asked me if I stole it, and Jordan and I said no at the same time. At first she didn’t say thank you. She just turned it on while the other HSKs (High School Kids) watched her, but she told them to go away and quit blowing smoke in her face—which semed weird since she’s a smoker too. She held the MP3 up and pointed at the screen. She asked me what happened to the Singin in the Rain song.

The little screen saidd On the Street Where You Live.

I asked her what she meant, even though I knew already. I was just getting time to think. She said this used to be on Singin in the Rain. What happened?

I told her I didn’t know.

She snorted and I said I didn’t know again.

She was all uh-huh, right, whatever, and she put the MP3 in her pocket.

She called the other HSKs over. I thought she was going to tell them I was lying, and they’d start calling me Banana, so I thought I’d come clean. Like it’d be easier that way. So I told Jordan real fast that I had listened to it. Then I remembered that thing in Glow about how if you’re crushing on a guy you’re supposed to learn to like what he likes. I had an idea. I told Jordan I really liked Singin in the Rain and Somewhere over the Rainbow and all the other songs I could remember from the MP3. I just kept naming songs as fast as I could.
She told me to shhhhh. I didn’t. I said that Singin in the Rain is my favorite musical (not a lie: I’ve only watched a scene from it and all of Sound of Music, and anythings better than Sound of Music). I said that Gene Kelly is my favorite actor in any musical I’ve seen (not a lie). Then Jordan told me to SHUT UP. One of the HSKs asked Jordan what I was talking about and Jordan said she didn’t know (a lie). Another one asked Jordan if she liked musicals as much as I did, and she said that she thought musicals blew (a huge lie). Then they all laughed at me. One of them said, Real cool, Stick, only it was like when Andrea “Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire” Ogilvy told me my sweater was nice.

That’s when I thought of one of the flirting tips Billie sent me, the asking-for-help tip. I said excuse me real loud, and they all stopped laughing (!!!) and waited for me to finish. I told Jordan there was this mean girl who always gave me a hard time on the bus, and I needed advice for making her quit. I went on and on about how Jordan was so tough and how she’d know a lot because she was older blah blah blah.

The other HSKs laughed, but kind of quietly, and they stopped when Jordan said I had to act like the girl didn’t bug me. I had to show the girl I could give it too.

I asked what I was supposed to be giving her and Jordan said she’d show me, just point to the girl when we get on the bus. One of the HSKs told me yeah, she’d show you all right, and they all laughed, even Jordan. (Not sure why.)

They ignored me and talked about some teacher they have. The bus rolled up. Jordan got on behind me. She mumbled which one? I mumbled blonde hair, pink tracksuit.

Things got interesting. Pants-on-Fire had her basketball bag kind of in the aisle, so it was in your way but you could step over it easy. Well Jordan didn’t step over it. She kicked it and said you better get this crap outta my way.
Pants-on-Fire just stared. Her face was as pink as her tracksuit.

Ms. Silver yelled at Jordan to keep moving, but she just said yeah, yeah, yeah, which made everyone laugh except Pants-on-Fire and Ms. Silver. Jordan kicked her bag again, and Pants-on-Fire moved it. Once we’d all passed, I thought she’d call Jordan or me a name, but she didn’t. When I glanced back she was looking out the window. Kimberley and Jocelyn were trying to talk to her but she was ignorin them.

And then I sat with the high school kids, and they didn’t call me names. They kept talking to each other about some teacher.

the bell. Got to post this.

**PAJAMAS!!! PAJAMAS!!! HA HA HA!!! (NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**

*Saturday, September 9, 8:33 p.m.*

Practiced so much today that my arms feel tingly now (Elli says it’s all in my head, but I don’t think so). As soon as the last bell rang, Cole and I met in the band hall to work on the xylophone part for “Lament,” so we could use the real xylophone instead of the little bell kits we have at home. Keith was already on the xylophone when we got there, so Cole and I shared the marimba. Liam had left his bell mallet on one of the stands—his name is written on it—and I wanted to dare Keith to pinch the handle and run his fingers up from the bottom to the top, because if you do, you get a million glittery splinters. (I did it on accident once.) Only I couldn’t figure out a way to dare him without sounding obvious. Keith left after a few minutes anyway. Then Cole and I took turns on the xylophone. There’s this part where you have to play two notes at once, which is so, so
hard, but Cole wrote the names of the notes on my sheet music for me (like, he wrote the letter C over the note that meant C), and that made it easier.

At 4:30 we met Billie at the abandoned house. Cole was still having trouble with the flamadiddle part on snare, because it has a lot of crazy rests thrown in, so I stood behind him and tapped out the part on his back while he played along, so he could feel the rhythm. But I think that made him mess up more, so I stopped and counted out the part instead.

Elli brought her clarinet but didn’t practice. Again. She had her *Cosmo* magazine and kept reading the juicy parts out loud (I’ve been sworn to secrecy, but I’ll give you one hint: pajamas). She got it at Ms. White’s the other day, and now she keeps it in a Super-Secret Location.

I’m going to get out my bell kit now and practice that hard part with the two-notes-at-the-same-time thing. If I can memorize it, I’ll be OK. I can’t make out the notes fast enough when I have to read them and play them.

Except for drum parts. They’re just rhythms, so I can read them quick. The rhythms go straight from my eyes to my hands, without me having to think about it. It’s like my brain doesn’t even know what’s happening. Drumming is the only time I’m not thinking about anything at all.

**STINKY (STILL NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**

*Saturday, September 9, 9:19 p.m.*

Mom yelled at me for playing on my bell kit too loud. She was trying to watch “Are Holidays Bad for Your Kids?” on some newsy talk show. I practiced in my closet with
the door shut for a while, but it got really stuffy. Plus, it smells like sour milk in there (not sure why).

I think I’ll go to bed early tonight. Off to take a shower.

**I JUST REMEMBERED! (STILL NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**
Saturday, September 9, 9:46 p.m.

I forgot a coffee mug hidden in my closet! And it was half full! All that milk!

**I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HOLIDAYS, BUT SOUR MILK IS VERY BAD FOR YOUR KIDS (STILL NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**
Saturday, September 9, 10:19 p.m.

Tried to study for a science quiz, but I’m totally grossed out now and can’t concentrate. I swear I can smell the sour milk even though the closet is shut. As soon as Mom and Dad go to bed, I’ll sneak the cup to the kitchen and wash it. (If they see me with it, they’ll get onto me.) But Mom is still watching TV (in the living room, not in the birds’ room this time) and Dad is still playing *Attack!*

I’m going to go to sleep now. For real this time. I’ll lie in bed and face away from the closet.

**WHAT PAJAMAS ARE YOU? (STILL NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**
Saturday, September 9, 10:48 a.m.

“Your’re an oversized T-shirt. You’re plain, but that’s what’s so great about you. You’re unpretentious and familiar—the first thing someone reaches for when they want to relax in bed with a good book.” (Take the quiz.)
What a dumb quiz! I’m not plain.

I think I just heard Mom and Dad go to their bedroom. Time to get rid of this cup.

MORE ON WHAT PAJAMAS ARE YOU? (STILL NINE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Saturday, September 9, 11:16 a.m.

Elli took the pajamas quiz, and she got “lace nightie”: “Feminine but seductive, you’re great for a special occasion. You may not be worn every day, but when you are, it’s a guarantee that things will get romantic.”

So I took the quiz again, and this time it sounds more like me:

“You’re a silk kimono. You’re elegant, exotic, and smooth. You’re the pajamas of choice for the dangerous lady who always gets her man. Then and now, you’re always in style.”

DID JORDAN JUST GIVE ME A PRESENT OR IS SHE MAKING FUN OF ME? (SEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Monday, September 11, 11:10 a.m.

When the bus came this morning, Jordan stayed at the back of the line with me. She handed me a CD she burned. No label on it. I got headphones from the librarian, and I’m listening to it on one of the library computer right now. Some musical-type songs that were on her MP3 player, plus some jazz and some rock and some old-timey country.

Should I make her a CD back?

JORDAN’S PRESENT (STILL SEVEN DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Monday, September 11, 11:12 a.m.
Of course I should.

Now, what should I put on it? I’ll probably put on a lot of Foxboro and maybe some of Mom’s Carpenters (since Jordan likes old, corny songs). Any other ideas? If anybody can lend me some CDs, let me know.
Steve,

Thanks for saying I can borrow some of your country CDs. None of my other friends have any country music—besides alternative country, like Foxboro, which is different—and I think Jordan must like it since she put it on my mix CD.

Yes, Keith Urban and Rascal Flatts sound like good ideas. I’ve never heard George Strait before, but I’ll give it a shot. Maybe Jordan would like that.

Thanks,
Anna

Steve,

What do you mean, everybody’s heard George Strait. There are tons of people who haven’t heard George Straight. There’s me and Cole and Billie/Elli and everybody who goes to the school for the deaf in Romney, to name just a few.
P.S.: All those Amazon people who live in huts haven’t heard George Strait either.

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: parties
Sent: Monday, September 11, 7:25 p.m.

Elli,

I AM going to put Foxboro on Jordan’s mix CD, and that is NOT a “dumb” thing to do. Why would it keep her from inviting me and you to any high school parties? I think she’d like Foxboro—better than she’d like your kind of music, anyway (insert fake drumbeats and too-loud, hand-waving, eyes-scrunching singing here).

Wait, who said anything about high school parties?

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: parties
Sent: Monday, September 11, 8:44 p.m.

Elli,
I’m not doing it because of the parties, I’m doing it because . . . I don’t know why.

Well, one thing is, if I can get her to be my friend, then maybe the High School Kids will leave me alone.

And I was teasing when I said that thing about the eyes-scrunching singers you like.

You always take things so seriously.

Anna

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From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: parties
Sent: Monday, September 11, 9:10 p.m.

Elli,

I WAS teasing!

It’s like how you were “teasing” when you said putting Foxboro on Jordan’s mix CD was a dumb idea.

And I already told you I was sorry for making that joke about your mom haunting you. How many times do you want me to say it?

Anna

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From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: parties
Sent: Monday, September 11, 9:22 p.m.
Billie (not Elli),

Fine, if I owe you a million I’m-sorry’s, then you owe me a billion for all the times you ever said I dress boring and made me feel ugly (and when I say “all the times,” I mean “every single day of my life”).

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: Message.
Sent: Monday, September 11, 9:22 p.m.

Dear Cole,

Please give your sister a message for me. Tell her that she’d better bring me my suede shoe back or else tell me where she hid it.

Your friend,

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Message.
Sent: Monday, September 11, 10:07 p.m.
Cole,

Tell her that’s fine by me. I didn’t want to talk to her again anyway.

Anna

P.S.: Sure, I’d love a copy of Billy Matheny’s CD. That’d be awesome. Thanks SO MUCH for offering to burn it for me. And, don’t worry, I won’t tell Billie “Dishes It Out But Can’t Take It” Martin that you made it for me either, since she’s so wah-wah-crybaby and all.
BEST DAY EVER!!! (SIX DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)
Tuesday, September 12, 4:20 p.m.

Guess who just made a great new friend today. I’ll give you a hint: she has excellent taste in bands, she’s too mature to worry about her clothes the way some girls do, and she can play the whole snare part for “Lament” without looking at the sheet music. Give up? It’s me!

Now guess who my new friend is. I’ll give you a hint: she has her learner’s permit, she goes to high school parties, and she’s THE COOLEST PERSON I’VE EVER MET. Give up? It’s JORDAN!!!

I burned her a CD that was full of the Carpenters and Foxboro and Rascal Flatts and a few songs from the ’50s. When I gave it to her and told her what was on it, I could tell she was impressed. I bet she’s going to give me another CD soon.

We talked at the bus stop, and she introduced me to her high school friends, Dalton, Tyler, and Lexi (short for Alexis—what a cool nickname!).

The best part was, when I got on the bus, Andrea “Varnish Face” Ogilvy was digging around in her basketball bag (probably for her lip-gloss), and I kind of nudged her with my hip so she dropped it and stuff fell all over the floor. Jordan and all my other new friends laughed and laughed. Then we all sat together and talked about how we can’t wait to get out of Hanover. Jordan says that she wants to move to Austin after she graduates because she has an uncle there who can get her a job in his office. She’s says they tape a famous music show there called Austin City Limits (in the city of Austin, not in her uncle’s office, obviously). She says that the slogan for the city is “Keep Austin Weird.” Isn’t that awesome!
I’m going to get ready to meet Cole to go practice at the abandoned house. The chair test will be here in less than a week, and there’s still a roll part that we don’t always nail.
Dear Cole,

Please, please, please don’t tell Billie about what happened at the abandoned house today! I’m so embarrassed! I’d die if she found out Jordan didn’t say a word to me when she showed up with the High School Kids!

Well, she did kind of nod hi to me. When it happened, I thought she was just getting her bangs out of her eyes, but she was looking at me when she did it, so, you know, maybe . . .

If Lexi wouldn’t have said, “Let’s get out of here and let the kiddies have their playhouse to themselves,” then maybe they would have stayed longer than seven seconds, and maybe Jordan would have had time to do more than the bangs-toss/nod-hi thing.

And, really, it wasn’t such a huge lie when I blogged that Jordan is my friend now. Because at least she’s not calling me names anymore. That’s the honest truth. And I did give her the CD, and she did smile when she took it. And she was talking about moving to Austin—just not to me exactly. But she was sitting so close to me that, even though she was talking to the High School Kids, she knew I could hear her, so maybe it was like she was talking to me, in a way. It’s not like I was hiding behind a curtain and listening in or anything like that.

Anna
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Our little secret.
Sent: Tuesday, September 12, 8:47 p.m.

Cole,

Sure I made Andrea “Klutz” Ogilvy drop her bag on the bus. That part wasn’t a lie. I rammed her really hard with my elbow.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Our little secret.
Sent: Tuesday, September 12, 9:34 p.m.

Cole,

OK, yeah, that part really was a lie, too. (What are you? Psychic or something?)

But she really did drop her bag. And I did hit her with my elbow a little bit, so maybe I did make her drop it. It’s possible.

Anna
Just got back from practicing snare. Oh, and breaking the law, too.

Cole and I were at the abandoned house (again) today when the High School Kids showed up (again). Each of them had on a backpack (again), and Lexi was carrying a boom box (the boom-box part was new). She didn’t look too happy to see us. She was all, “Come on, you guys, forget it. I’m telling you, this place has turned into a preschool, for real.” Tyler said that we should be the ones to leave, since they were here first, but then Dalton was like, “It’s a big house. I don’t feel like going anywhere else today. Let’s just go upstairs, and they can stay downstairs.” Well, that didn’t last long (if it had been a perm, my mom would say it “didn’t take”). As soon as I started practicing snare, Lexi came down, shaking her finger at me—“Oh no, Banana Finnegan. Uh-uh. This has got to stop. You are being way too loud with that thing.”

If I wanted to play quietly, I would have just played at home. So I told her that we’d only be here for a few more days because our test was on Monday, so couldn’t she just put up with us for a little bit longer.

By now they were all standing there, watching us.

For a while, nobody said anything. Then Jordan said, “Can you play anything cool on that?”

“I don’t know,” said Cole. “What’s cool?”

Dalton shouted out the name of some song I’d never heard of. Even after he said, “You know, they play it all the time on the radio,” I didn’t know what he was talking about.
“We can play ‘Lament,’” I said. Then I played the really tricky part—the part with all the rolls.

If my life were a movie, they all would have said, “Wow, you’re great. You can stay here as long as you want and be our best friend.” And one of them would have had an uncle/cousin/neighbor/lawn cutter who was starting a rock band, and Cole and I would have signed up to be their percussionists, and we would have made it big, and then we would have gotten to travel around the world with Foxboro (and Foxboro would have been opening for us). But the only person who thought “Lament” was cool at all was Jordan. I know because she asked me if she could try doing a drum roll; she couldn’t get it, but nobody gets it on the first try, so that’s not a big deal.

Anyway, after Jordan tried to roll a few times, Lexi started looking at her watch, and then they all went back upstairs, got their bags, and left. But a second later, Jordan came back in and said she’d forgotten something she had to go back upstairs for, only instead of going upstairs for anything, she stuffed a piece of paper in my hand and said, “Ssssh,” when I tried to ask what it was. Then she whispered, “Don’t read it until you get home.” She went back out on the porch again, and I heard Lexi say, “So I guess we’re going to Ms. White’s and coming back later, huh?” and Jordan said, “Yeah.” And off they went.

That’s when something came over me and I had this wild idea: what if I happened to show up at Ms. White’s gas station, too?

So we went to the gas station a few minutes after they got there. You could tell Lexi wanted us to go away because she kept rolling her eyes, but Dalton said we could score some snacks for them, and everyone laughed. I said we didn’t have any money (well, we did, but I wasn’t going to spend it on them), and Dalton said we didn’t need any money.
We were just supposed to go in there and take what we wanted. At first we said we wouldn’t, but Lexi said, “OK, then, Banana Thinnegan, don’t do it. But if you don’t, you and your little boyfriend will have to go back to pre-school where you belong,” so I told Cole we’d better, we’d just take something small that Ms. White wouldn’t miss. Ms. White was doing something in the back room when we walked in, so it was really easy to grab some Necco wafers. (I took a couple of Snickers bars, too, just in case.) We brought them back out to the High School Kids, and they laughed again, like it was the funniest thing they’d ever seen. Lexi took the snacks from us and told us to go back home because they were all going to the abandoned house. I asked if we could go with them, but Lexi said, “Yeah, so sorry, Anna,” only she didn’t sound sorry—she just sounded plain mean. But at least she called me by my real name. That’s a first.

As I’m sure you can guess, I was dying to read the note the entire time, but I waited until I got home. This is what it said. Wait, let me go get it. It’s in my coat pocket:

Anna,

I already have This is Your Pilot Speaking, but I like the other Foxboro songs you put on the CD, too. I’d never heard them before. You would probably really enjoy the Monarchs. E-mail me if you want to trade some more mix CDs:
femmefatale@kln.net.

Jordan
P.S.: Did you “get” what all the songs I put on your mix CD had in common?

(They all talk about journeys.)

It’s so nice to have Jordan as my new friend. It was so considerate of her to offer to trade some more CDs, since we have the same good taste in music and all. I think I’ll start making a new mix CD for her. I bet it won’t be long before I start going to all kinds of parties with her. Big, fun parties with live bands and no parents and lots of cute guys to dance with.
Dear Jordan,

Trading more mix CDs sounds like fun! I have a band test in six days, so practicing is going to take up a lot of my time, but I’ll make your CD as soon as I can. Hopefully that will be in the next couple of days.

And making all the songs have to do with journeys was a great idea, BTW.

Anna

Dear Steve,

Could you do me a big favor? It’d be awesome if you could lend me some more of your CDs, whatever ones you can spare. Maybe some of those box sets? I’m going to start working on a new mix CD for Jordan, and I want to have a big selection of songs to choose from.

You could either bring them to school tomorrow or whenever.

Just let me know.
Thanks a lot,
Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: SOS!
Sent: Wednesday, September 13, 7:56 p.m.

COLE!!!

I NEED ANY COOL MUSIC YOU HAVE: COUNTRY, JAZZ, CLASSICAL, ANYTHING. SITUATION CRITICAL!!! BRING AS MUCH AS YOU CAN, AS SOON AS YOU CAN. I NEED TO MAKE A CD OF SONGS THAT HAVE SOMETHING IN COMMON—FAST!!!

ANNA

P.S.: WHAT CAN THEY HAVE IN COMMON? CRAP!!!
P.P.S.: I DIDN’T EVEN REALIZE THE ONES SHE PUT ON MY CD HAD ANYTHING IN COMMON UNTIL SHE TOLD ME!

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: All I have left to do is write out the track list.
Sent: Wednesday, September 13, 10:11 p.m.
Cole,

Thanks for coming over and helping me make Jordan’s mix CD. It’s a good thing you have so many CDs, or else I couldn’t have made all the songs have to do with “weird people or things.” (Do you think she’ll realize I picked that theme because I overheard her talking on the bus about people wanting to “keep Austin weird”? I hope not. Or maybe that would be a good thing. I don’t know.)

Maybe I shouldn’t give her the CD for a few days, so she won’t realize I hurried up and made it tonight.

Thanks again,

Anna

P.S.: No, I’ll be too nervous if I wait. I’ll give her the CD tomorrow. That won’t seem too un-cool, I don’t think.

P.P.S.: Yes it would. It’d be like I didn’t have anything better to do than make a CD. And I DO have something better to do: work on the last section in the snare part. I mean, blah blah blah. I can’t think about this anymore.

P.P.P.S.: But maybe it wouldn’t be too uncool.
Dear Steve,

You said you’ve been to Austin before, right? What’s it like? What do people do for fun there? I’m curious.

Anna (who is now going to practice her snare part for the chair test, she swears)
WHAT IS YOUR WEIRDNESS STYLE? (STILL FIVE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)  
Wednesday, September 13, 10:43 p.m.

Steve sent me this quiz a while ago (it’s kind of weird, but it’s a quiz about being weird, so I guess that was on purpose???). Here’s my weirdness style:

“Why did the chicken cross the road? Because your weirdness style is jokester, that’s why! Break out the joy buzzers, whoopee cushions, and clown noses, because you’re here to make everyone laugh. We’re not kidding around when we say that your weirdness style means you enjoy kidding around. You’re one barrel of laughs!”

(Steve’s weirdness style was “maverick.”)

ARE YOU A PROCRASTINATOR? (STILL FIVE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)  
Wednesday, September 13, 10:49 p.m.

“Based on your answers, you have a minor problem with procrastination. You may pay your bills by the due date, but just barely. You may turn in your projects on time, but just under the wire. Breaking tasks into small chunks, keeping to a schedule, and rewarding yourself might help keep you motivated.”

Oh no, PROJECT! That reminds me, I’m supposed to come up with some miniature people for the Fahrenheit 451 diorama by Thursday. And we’re supposed to have the first fifty pages of the book read, too. I’m only on page 9.
Steve,

Thanks for telling me all that stuff about Austin. I can’t believe there is a swarm of bats that lives under a bridge there! The Shady Grove restaurant sounds the best, though, since it has live bands that play there during the summer. Oh, and Sixth Street sounds fun, too, since that’s where all the concerts happen. And so does “the Drag.”

Also: I don’t need to go to your house to pick up any of the CDs. You could just bring them on the bus. That would probably be easier.

Anna

Steve,

No, I wasn’t planning a trip to Austin or anything. I was just wondering about it since I’ve never been there, that’s all.

Anna
Dear Jordan,

Have you gotten a chance to listen to the mix CD yet? The theme is “weird people and things.” I figured you’d like that since you like Austin so much (“Keep Austin Weird”).

I think the coolest restaurant in Austin is this one called the Shady Grove. It has all kinds of different American-ish food—catfish, plain old chicken sandwiches, etc. But its claim to fame is a little outside eating area where they have bands come and play in the summer. Almost every single night you can hear a band out there.

And the swarm of bats is pretty awesome, too!

Anna

Jordan,
I haven’t been to Austin City Limits before, but I would love to go one day. If it’s anything like “the Drag” (a.k.a.: Guadalupe Street), I bet it’s a blast.

Of course you can borrow my Foxboro CDs to burn. I can drop by your house with them Monday after school.

Anna
Those steaks are as good as gone—well, semi-gone, anyway.

It happened a few hours ago. Dad opened the freezer to get out some frozen peas, and then (from my room) I heard all the steaks come tumbling out and him yelling, “That is IT!” He stormed out to Ms. White’s to pick up some fried chicken for dinner instead, and when he got back home, he told Mom that he’d solve the steak problem. He said he’s going to give half of the steaks to Ms. White (only he called her “Olivette,” and Mom said, “You mean Olivette White?” and Dad said, “What? Do you know any other Olivettes?”). He said Ms. White was going to come over and pick them up tonight after she got off work.

She showed up around ten. Her voice was so loud, I could hear her through my closed door: “Thank you so much for this, Kendall. My kid’s going to love these. You know how growing boys are—always hungry for something. And that’s just Mr. White. My son’s going to like them, too.” Then she, Mom, and Dad all laughed at her joke. (I don’t think it was very funny, do you?)

Turns out, the three of them finished high school the same year. They started talking about when Ms. White married Mr. White (they eloped right after graduation), and the time they all took a class trip to D.C. and Dad fell down the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, and the time some guy named Johnny memorized a Richard Prier (sp?) record and performed it in the gym. Then Mom said, “I mixed some low-fat milk and some pasteurized milk . . .” and everybody laughed. What’s so funny about milk? Must be some kind of (stupid) inside joke.
They’re still out there talking now. Cutting up and acting all weird.

**RICHARD PRYOR (STILL FOUR DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**  
**Thursday, September 14, 12:28 p.m.**

OK, I Googled it, and Richard Pryor was a comedian. (Ms. White just left, BTW. She went outside, came back in, and said, “Whoopsy-daisy! Almost went off and forgot to bring the steaks!” But now she’s gone for good.)

Also: Cole sent me a link to [this quiz](#) today. It tells you what kind of drum you are. I’m tenor drums and so is he. That means we’re both “complex” and “intellectual.” Even more proof that we have a lot in common. :-)

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**ANDREA, THOU ART AN IDIOT (THREE DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**  
**Friday, September 15, 10:31 a.m.**

In Mr. Taylor’s class right now.

Andrea “Wherefore Art Thou, Keith?” Ogilvy is looking up Shakespeare-type costumes online.

On the bus this morning, I heard her talking to Jocelyn and Kimberley about the Halloween dance (oops, I mean literary dance). She told them she wanted to wear a “couple costume” with Keith. I guess she’s thinking Romeo and Juliet. Ms. Remington will pee her pants when she finds that out.

I shouldn’t be surprised that she is looking up costumes a month and a half before the dance. She was looking up Smith College’s basketball team, and she won’t be out of high school for another four and a half years.
Anyway, enough about her.

This morning at the bus stop, Jordan had some tarot cards, and she was telling everybody’s fortunes. After she did it for Lexi, Tyler, and Dalton, I asked if she would do mine. The other High School Kids laughed, and Jordan said she didn’t have time. But once we got on the bus and I was sitting with her, I asked her how she liked the new CD I made her, especially the songs from *My Fair Lady* I put on it, and she stopped me and said, “I guess I do have time to tell your fortune, now that we’re on the bus.” She’s such a good friend that she spent longer on my reading than on anyone else’s. It lasted all the way to the high school. Some of the things the tarot cards said about me: I will find success in life soon, I’m a caring person, and I’m very good at keeping secrets.

Anyway, I can’t wait for the day to be over. I’m going to walk with Jordan to her house and lend her my Foxboro CDs so she can burn them. We’ll probably hang out some, too. She’ll probably teach me how to read the tarot cards if I tell her I’m interested. Because I was just looking over some of my old blog entries last night, and I remembered that one of my plans to earn money for a drum set was to give tarot readings. Wouldn’t it be cool if Jordan got me into some high school parties AND helped me buy a drum set?
Billie,

No, you do not see me in the study carrel across from you. That is a figment of your imagination.

And I can ignore you forever, no matter how many e-mails you send me that say, “You can’t ignore me forever.”

Now, leave me alone before the librarian sees I’m not using the computer for homework.

Anna

Billie,

Of course I can keep a secret.

Tell me! Tell me!

Anna
Elli,

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!! I cannot BELIEVE Keith said that! I wonder if Andrea “Shakespeare” Ogilvy knows. She would never dress as a pirate wench in a million jillion years, even if Keith did dress as a pirate, and even if there are tons of famous books written about pirates. And I wonder if Keith knows about her Romeo and Juliet idea? Ha ha ha ha ha ha!!!

I’ve been dying to tell you about this: I’ve been talking to Steve about Austin, so I could tell Jordan about it, and I asked him if I could borrow some of his music to make her a mix CD. Well, yesterday he sent me an e-mail and asked if I wanted to GO OVER TO HIS HOUSE and check out his CDs. And this morning on the bus he SAVED ME A SEAT and told me more stuff about Austin, TX, and Beaumont, TX, and a bunch of other cities in Texas. On and on and on. Texas, Texas, Texas.

He must think I’m really interested in Texas, like I want to take a vacation there (he asked me if I did). REALLY, I only asked him about it so I could talk to Jordan. But I can’t tell him that. That would seem ratty of me. And it would make me look like a loser, like I’m sucking up to Jordan or something.

And now he’s asking me to go to his house and stuff!

Now what?
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans@kln.net>
Subject: RE: you can't ignore me forever
Sent: Friday, September 15, 1:25 p.m.

Elli,

But I don’t like him. That’s what sucks. If I liked him, I would totally go to his house, and then you could call me Mrs. Steven Broussard all you want and I wouldn’t care. But he’s either always driving me crazy or he’s just kind of . . . oh, you know . . . there. He’s like the saltines Ms. White gives you with your cheese-and-broccoli soup. They’re nothing wrong with the saltines, but let’s be real, it’s all about the soup. (Even if the saltines have traveled all over the country and live in a house with a burglar alarm and hardwood floors or marble floors or fourteen-karat-gold floors or whatever they’re made of.)

I mean, let’s look at the facts: Fact #1: He likes regular country music; I like indie bands and alternative country, which is very different. Fact #2: He has a favorite NASCAR driver; I have a favorite way to play tambourine (when you get stuck playing it as much as I do, you learn real quick how to keep your hand from getting red and puffy by the end of class).

Anna Finnegan (not Broussard)
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans@kln.net>
Subject: RE: you can’t ignore me forever
Sent: Friday, September 15, 1:29 p.m.

Elli,

Ohmigod, are you crazy? Why would I want you to ride the bus home with me? If I wanted to find out more about him (which I don’t), I could ask him myself.

Anna

P.S.: I know people say opposites attract.

P.P.S.: People also say that if you swallow a watermelon seed, a watermelon will grow in your stomach.

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: So sorry!
Sent: Friday, September 15, 6:38 p.m.

Steve,

Sorry Billie kept asking you all those questions on the bus home today. She’s always been a curious person, and she gets really bad about it when she forgets to take her medication.
Billie!

What were you thinking???

Why did you ask Steve all that stuff???

And after we got off the bus, why did you blab on and on to Jordan about going to her house to burn Foxboro CDs? I mean, it’s cool that you wanted to go with us and all, but why did you have to be so loud about it? All the other High School Kids were looking at her funny. No wonder she ignored us until they turned onto a different street.

Remember when you got me in trouble with Mrs. Remington because you hit me on the head to get my attention, and I said you needed to be more subtle?

I’ll say it again: BE MORE SUBTLE!

Anna
Elli,

Big deal if we found out he likes going to concerts? He only likes *country* concerts. Big deal if we found out he likes playing video games? His favorite video game is *Deer Hunter*. And before you say that the deer he kills in *Deer Hunter* aren’t actual deer: he also likes to hunt for real and owns his own rifle. Hello. I’m a vegetarian, remember? It’s bad enough I have to push all the steaks out of the way to get to my tofu burgers in the freezer (twenty-nine steaks to go). Steve would probably want me to help him skin the deer he kills and mount their heads on the wall.

Also: It’s not that Jordan let us go to Ms. White’s with her and the other High School Kids just because you went on and on about the CDs. She probably would have let us go with her anyway, so don’t act like you worked her over with your hypno-voodoo schmoozing. That didn’t have anything to do with it.

The beer stealing didn’t have anything to do with it either. I can’t believe you said we’d do it! It’s one thing to steal candy from Ms. White’s, but who steals beer? And we were stealing beer *for the High School Kids*. If they wanted it so bad, they should have stolen it. I know it was only four beers, but still.

Oh, I just thought of this: what if Ms. White has a security camera pointed at the fridge where the beer is? She might have us on tape! Did you notice any cameras? I didn’t notice any, but I wasn’t looking for them either.

Anna
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: WTH!
Sent: Friday, September 15, 8:47 p.m.

Elli,

First of all, I have heard country music before.

Second, me not wanting to go out with Steve isn’t anything like the Poker Players not wanting to be friends with me. They’re being freaks. I’m not.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: Meat is murder
Sent: Friday, September 15, 9:10 p.m.

Steve,

Why do you like to hunt? I’m a vegetarian, and I love nature, so I can’t imagine killing an animal.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: FW: RE: Meat is murder.
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 5:25 a.m.

Elli,

I asked Steve why he likes to hunt. This was his answer.

---Steven Broussard <steve_20@kln.net> wrote:

> From: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
> To: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
> Subject: Re: Meat is murder.
> Date: Friday, September 15, 10:34 p.m.
>
> hey, anna,
>
> i guess i like to hunt because i like being out in nature and because i like to have good
> meat instead of the stuff you get at the grocery store. and i always hunt with my dad, so
> that makes it a lot of fun. then after we get back from hunting, mom will always fix us a
> big pot of bean soup—it’s really spicy and our favorite.
>
> why are you a vegetarian? i’ve never known a vegetarian before.
>
> let me know if you want to come over and borrow some of my other cds sometime.
From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Meat is murder
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 11:21 a.m.

Steve,

I’m a vegetarian because I like nature too. I like nature so much that I don’t want to kill things that come from nature and eat them. It doesn’t seem fair.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Meat is murder
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 1:18 p.m.

Steve,

Ohmigosh, of course I realize that vegetables are part of nature, too. But that’s different. Vegetables don’t feel anything when you pick them and cut them up.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Meat is murder  
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 2:18 p.m.

Steve,

What do you mean “how do I know they don’t feel anything?” Because I just know, that’s how.

Anna

P.S.: You’re a little bit crazy, you know that?

---

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Meat is murder
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 2:48 p.m.

Steve,

OK, maybe it’s not polite to call someone crazy. But it’s also not polite to fill almost a whole e-mail with “LOL,” and you didn’t see anything wrong with doing that just now, did you?

Anna
If I were a rich and famous percussionist, I think I would buy the abandoned house and paint it yellow and clean all of the little trees out of the rain gutter and move in some nice furniture. That way, it could keep being where I practice—my “practicing house.” I would, of course, also have a big house in New York City—my “everyday house.”

Cole and I were practicing there a little while ago (at the abandoned house, not in New York City), and I got thinking that it wouldn’t look like such a creepy place if somebody fixed it up a little bit. And it would make a nice story for Spin magazine, too, all about how I stayed true to my roots and “kept it real” and remembered rinky-dink, one-stop-light Hanover even though I now appear in music videos with my band, the Finnegan Project (other name idea: the Banana Suits), and have a bodyguard named Thorn, even though I’ve told Thorn a hundred times that I don’t need him since I have a black belt in karate, but he always says, “I’d worry about you too much, Ms. Finnegan,” so I let him stay around and teach him my new karate moves, just for fun, and then one day we get in my orange Porsche and drive to Keith’s house, where all of the Poker Players just happen to be, and once we’ve wowed them with my awesome ride, we rough them up a little bit, and then we go to Ms. Whites and have a cheeseburger because I’m “keeping it real.” I keep it so real that every year I buy a nice drum set and give it to a girl at Hanover Middle School, and she doesn’t have to share it with anybody if she doesn’t want to, and it won’t make her parents fight about money because it was a gift from yours truly.
And, you know, I practiced so well today, I really might become rich and famous if I keep it up. Even Ryan Peppercorn, the drummer for Foxboro, had to start somewhere (insert the theme from *Rocky* here).

Anyway, enough rah-rah, you-can-do-it, cheese-tastic talk. Cole’s waiting for me in the living room, and I can hear my Dad talking to him about *Attack!* I need to rescue him so we can go to his house and play *Guitar Hero*.

Anna

**BUT FIRST . . . (STILL TWO DAYS TILL CHAIR TEST)**

*Saturday, September 16, 6:42 p.m.*

*Here* is the drum set I would buy for the middle-school girl—or for myself right now if I had the money :-(( .

And *here* is the orange Porsche.
From: "Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>  
To: "Rob" <car.number8@kln.net>  
Subject: RE: hi  
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 7:20 p.m.

Rob,

No, I don’t have a crush on Steve. Why do you ask? Does he have a crush on me or something?

Anna

From: "Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>  
To: "Billie" <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>  
Subject: Rob.  
Sent: Saturday, September 16, 7:24 p.m.

Elli,

I just got two e-mails from Steve’s friend Rob. The first one asked if I had a crush on Steve. I said no and asked why he was asking, did Steve have a crush on me? Rob wrote back and said no, Steve just wanted to know is all. But I don’t believe him. People only ask if you have a crush on them if they have a crush on you, right?

I should have never asked him about Austin. Never.

Also: I never should have stolen those beers.

Anna
HOW HONEST ARE YOU? (ONE DAY TILL CHAIR TEST)  
Saturday, September 16, 9:02 p.m.

You are 45 percent honest. You aren’t a pathological liar, but you could still stand to tell the truth more. Maybe you should work on being a little more straightforward with people.

SHE PROBABLY DIDN'T HAVE A CAMERA, DID SHE? (STILL ONE DAY TILL CHAIR TEST)  
Saturday, September 16, 9:04 p.m.

Stomach hurts.

Can’t concentrate on the practice pad.

Ms. White is going to realize stuff is missing, and then I’ll get in trouble. She probably has a camera on in there. Maybe she takes an inventory of all the alcohol, and she’ll see some is missing, and then she’ll check the tape.

And she and my mom and dad go way back.

STOMACH STILL HURTS (STILL ONE DAY TILL CHAIR TEST)  
Saturday, September 16, 10:33 p.m.

This has to stop.

The way I figure, I’ve stolen about ten dollars of stuff from Ms. White. I’ve got thirty-one bucks in my cheetah bank. I’ll give her the money back. I’ll give her the money back tonight. I’m going to text Cole and Elli to see if they’ll go with me, if they’re still up. BRB . . .
OK, Cole just texted back and said he’d come with me. Elli is not answering, so she must be asleep.

I’m so excited, I feel like I just ate a whole handful of chocolate-covered espresso beans.

LIKE BONNIE AND CLYDE, ONLY DIFFERENT (STILL ONE DAY TILL CHAIR TEST)
Sunday, September 17, 1:45 a.m.

Cole and I went to Mrs. White’s gas station tonight and tried to put some money under the door. But I couldn’t get it through because of how tight the door fits and because of how the welcome mat inside was all bunched up. So I said something like, “I’ll just have to bring it tomorrow when she’s open. I’ll leave it someplace where she’ll find it after I’ve gone,” and Cole said something like, “Or we could just take care of it tonight.” And he looked at the windows on the side of the building, behind some trees and over the air conditioner, and twitched his eyebrows at me. Then we both started laughing. He dared me to climb on top of the air conditioner first, but I wouldn’t do it—I said, “No, you go”—so he went and tried the window.

It opened.

He lifted himself inside, and then he waited at the bottom to catch me once I’d wiggled through. I left the money, and we got to talking about how Halloween will be here pretty soon, and that’s when Ms. White showed up (insert horror-movie, dun-dun-dun music here).

We heard her trying to unlock the door. Cole hid behind the counter, and I ran through some swinging doors and ducked under a desk in the back room. It’s too bad
Cole hid where he did because that was the first place Ms. White looked after she turned the light on. He must have startled her because she yelped really loud. Then she started yelling at him really fast: “Whatareyoudoinghere? Iknowyou. You’reMr.Martin’skid. I’mcallingyourfather. I’mcallinghimrightnow.”

I couldn’t see her (because I was in the back room), but I could hear her footsteps getting louder, and I could tell she was coming my way. I knew the phone was on top of the desk I was hiding under. I could see where it was plugged into a phone jack.

But before Ms. White got to the swinging doors, Cole yelled at her to WAIT!!! He said that, yes, he’d stolen from her before, but he had come tonight to pay her back for it. He told her the money was on the counter (that’s where I’d put it). Nobody said anything for a while. Then Ms. White said she should still probably call Cole’s dad.

“But he’s in bed,” said Cole, and Ms. White made a snorting noise.

“Guess you should have thought of that before you broke in here.”

“But I was coming to give the money back to you,” said Cole, and that’s when I thought, why didn’t I just mail her the money instead?

“Your dad should still know about this,” said Ms. White. “You scared the living daylights out of me, young man.” She started walking toward me again, even though Cole kept saying, “Wait.” I smashed myself as small as I could against the phone jack and pulled the rolling chair in as close as I could, right before she opened the swinging doors, which squeaked. Then Ms. White stopped walking. I thought for sure it was because she’d seen me somehow, but she said to herself, “Where is my phone book?”

She went back into the main room. I let out the breath I’d been holding. I heard her rummaging through things, probably looking for the phonebook at the check-out counter.
After a while, Cole said, “Ms. White, I can just tell you the number,” which almost made me have a heart attack. How could he be so stupid?

Ms. White sighed and said, “Fine.”

Cole started telling her a number that wasn’t his Dad’s number at all; it sounded almost like my cell phone number, only one of the numbers was different. Then he said, “No, wait, wait,” and gave her another number that sounded almost like mine, but with a different number changed.

That’s when I realized that Cole wasn’t stupid—he was brilliant. I took my cell phone out of my coat pocket, as quietly as I could, and turned the ringer off. Then I waited.

Ms. White was asking him, “What? Don’t you know your own phone number?”

He said, “It’s hard to remember. I always just use my cell phone to call it, so I don’t have to push any numbers, I just push the button for ‘home,’ you know?”

Ms. White snorted again.

“I’ll just dial it for you on my cell,” Cole said. “That’ll be easier.”

My phone lit up silently in my hand: *Incoming Call: Oklahoma!* “It went to his voicemail,” Cole said, and Ms. White said, “Let me have that.”

She must have really taken it from him, because Cole said, “It’s the song from his favorite musical,” and I remembered that I still had part of “Singin’ in the Rain” set as my voicemail message.

“How’s it say ‘Calling: Music Man’?” Ms. White asked.

“Oh, it’s kind of a joke,” said Cole. “Jen and I call him that sometimes since he’s the band director.” I had to cover my mouth to keep from laughing when I heard that!
Ms. White left a message for Mr. Martin to call her back when he got a chance, it was about his son. Then she told off Cole a little bit (about being honest and not stealing, etc.) and left, and Cole followed her out. (BTW, the reason Ms. White showed up there at all was because she woke up in the middle of the night and thought she’d left her coffee pot on. She hadn’t.) After she’d gotten in her truck and driven off, I climbed back out the window (Ms. White had locked the deadbolt on the door) and met Cole outside. Then we hung out for a while downtown. Cole’s going to steal his dad’s phone some time tomorrow and text Ms. White something like, “I’ve talked to my son about this, and apparently he’s really sorry, and I’ve grounded him for a week, so let’s put this behind us and not talk about it anymore,” which is, of course, another brilliant plan, especially since Mr. Martin always uses the word “apparently.”

What an exciting night!
Billie,

Did we ever decide what it means to hook up with someone?

Anna

Billie,

No reason. I was just wondering.

Anna

Jordan,

AAAACK!
OHMIGOD! OHMIGOD! OHMIGOD! I THINK I HOOKED UP WITH COLE

BEHIND THE LIBRARY LAST NIGHT!!!! WHAT DO I DO NOW?????

I can’t tell Elli/Billie (they’re brother and sister, so that would be weird). But I have
to tell SOMEONE!

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan” <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: RE: AAAACK!
Sent: Sunday, September 17, 1:55 p.m.

Jordan,

I’m trying to calm down, but it’s hard to. It was AWESOME. This is the HAPPIEST
day of my ENTIRE life!!!

I wanted to slip some money for Ms. White under the gas station door, to make up for
the stuff I’ve stolen from her, and Cole said he’d come with me. He is SO NICE. He met
me on my porch, and we walked together. It was cold, so he let me wear his jacket. So
romantic!!! On the way to Ms. White’s, we talked about everything: band, parents,
movies, and the romance novels Billie hides in her sock drawer, which Cole and I aren’t
supposed to know about.

We ended up breaking into the gas station together, and we got into some trouble, but
Cole was SO BRAVE (insert royal trumpet fanfare here)!!!
We left and went walking around town, which looks so different at night. When we got to the public library, we found a skateboard lying in the back parking lot, and we took turns scooting around on it under the big light in the corner of the lot. Laughing and laughing. Then I fell off the skateboard and somehow managed to hit my eye on his shoulder—kind of hard, too. Cole joked that it’s too bad we didn’t have one of my mom’s steaks with us to put on it, but I could tell he was worried. The next thing I knew, I heard myself saying, “Oh, it stings so bad. Look. Do you think I really hurt myself? Do you think I’ll have a black eye?” even though it didn’t hurt much at all. (I don’t know what made me say that! It just flew out of my mouth!) And Cole stepped close to me and looked at my hurt eye in the orangey light. (It was like in the movies!) Then he looked up and said, “I think you’ll be OK,” and then there was this HUGE pause where we just stared at each other. And he kind of tilted his head, and I kind of tilted my head, and he leaned forward a little bit, and I leaned forward a little bit (just like in the movies!!!), and on the inside I was like, “OHMIGOD! OHMIGOD! OHMIGOD!” but I tried to look calm, like I’d done this a million times before, like I’m totally cool about giving away my candy-bar-type kisses, or whatever that quiz said they were. Chocolate-milk-type kisses or something.

Anyway, I always knew you were supposed to close your eyes when you kissed somebody, but I was worried I’d forget to do it when it really happened. Well, I didn’t forget. I just did it without thinking. So I didn’t see his face come super-close to mine, but I could feel his breath puffing on my cheek.

And then it happened. At first our lips didn’t line up very well. He had his mouth open too much or something, because they kind of went around my lips instead of on top
of them, so—technically—I had spit on my face from it. He was SO EMBARRASSED. He pulled back and kicked at the skateboard so it drifted away a few feet. He was like, “I’m really sorry,” and I was like, “It’s OK,” and he was like, “Look, I’m going to try again, OK?” and I was like, “Great” (“GREAT”! AAAAAACK!), and he put his hands on my shoulders and kissed me again. And this time it was the best kiss ever in the history of the world.

We kissed for, like, a whole minute I think. Just a bunch of little kisses (no French kisses), but still, how cool is that?

I still have his jacket. I’d be wearing it in my room right now, but I don’t want Mom or Dad to come in and see it.

It smells like him: like laundry detergent and ice-cream sandwiches.

Anna

P.S.: I won’t say anything crazy to him. That would be stupid. I am totally calm and rational.

From: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
To: “Jordan” <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: You’re wonderful.
Sent: Sunday, September 17, 2:10 p.m.

Dear Cole,
I just wanted to write you an e-mail to let you know how wonderful you are. You were wonderful to walk over with me in the middle of the night, and you were wonderful for lending me your jacket when I was cold, and you were wonderful for telling Ms. White all that stuff so I could stay out of trouble. It felt really wonderful to kiss you, too. I’ve wanted to kiss you for a long time.

Yours truly,

Anna
Today was the chair test. I was hoping I’d be able to write to you all about how I’m one step closer to owning my orange Porsche (I do think I did well on the test), but instead I want to write about the other thing that happened in band class today. All the Poker Players kept telling me that they could hear me during my test and that I sounded bad (not true). And then Keith went and put a sign on my chair that said “Stick a Fork in Me, I’m Done.” There was tape facing up on it, so when I sat down, it stuck to the seat of my pants, and I walked around forever with it on me before I found out.

How did I find out, you ask? I’ll tell you. I walked into science class and Andrea “Crisco Lips” Ogilvy poked me with her pencil when I passed her desk. When I made a face at her, she said, all innocent, “What? I’m just trying to do what the sign says.”

Boy, I sure do wish some friend of mine would have warned me about the sign so I could take it off. You know, some good friend who was there and saw the whole thing and didn’t say a word, even when the Poker Players said my test sounded bad, even when I passed him a note that said, “Why aren’t you talking to me? Are you mad or something?” Yeah, that would have been awesome. Too bad it didn’t happen that way. Too bad I had to sit by myself behind the bass drum the whole time and read an article in *Glow* called “18 Reasons Why It’s Good to Be Single.”

Anyway, enough about that.

Sat with Steve on the way home. When I told him about the sign on my butt, he made me feel a lot better. He suggested that I put a stink bomb in Andrea’s basketball bag (“There’s not enough Febreze in the world to take that smell out!”) and in Keith’s
backpack ("They’ll both stink so bad, they’ll be perfect for each other"). Not sure where I’d get a stink bomb, but I know where I can get some raw steak. Oh! Or I could leave some coffee-with-milk in my closet for a couple days and then pour it on them. (I’m kidding. Mostly.)

Also, did you know Texas used to be its own country? I didn’t until today.

I HATE LIARS
Monday, September 18, 5:58 p.m.

I was just watching TV when a car commercial came on playing a song by Foxboro. Bunch of sellouts. I’m never listening to Foxboro again.

I HATE HAPPY PEOPLE
Monday, September 18, 6:03 p.m.

Now a commercial for an online dating service just came on. “We’re soul mates,” “Our first kiss was magical,” “I’d spent years looking for someone like her,” blah blah blah. What do they have to be so smiley about?

THINKING ABOUT THINGS
Monday, September 18, 6:15 p.m.

Maybe I’ll turn Catholic so I can be a nun when I grow up. Then I won’t have to worry about being in love with anybody. I won’t have to worry about looking good either. I’ll just wear that black-and-white get-up every day. Maybe they’d need a
percussionist for their choir. I wouldn’t have to fight a bunch of guys to play the good parts.

**WHAT KIND OF PENGUIN ARE YOU?**  
*Monday, September 18, 6:18 p.m.*

You are the gentoo penguin. Gentoo penguins live in the Antarctic. They can be quite noisy. They can also be very aggressive if another penguin tries to take their nest-building materials. Don’t mess with a gentoo! They know what belongs to them, and they get cross when someone tries to steal it!
Dear Cole,

Look, I’m sorry about those snarky things I blogged earlier today. I guess . . . I don’t know, I guess I’m feeling kind of mixed up, that’s all.

Anyway: There’s a quiz at www.inthemirror.com that tells you what kind of indie you are. I got “too-cool-for-school indie.” Let me know what kind of indie you are. Maybe we’ll get the same results again, like with the “what kind of drum are you?” test.

Your friend,

Anna

Cole,

Did you get a chance to take the indie quiz yet?

Also, here’s a survey I just took. You should take it, too:

1. What time is it? 11:17 p.m.
2. What is your favorite day of the week? Saturday.

3. How do you label yourself? With Post-It notes.


5. Do you hate being labeled? The Post-Its aren’t bad, but the Sharpie’s a pain to wash off.

6. Reindeer or snowmen? Snowmen. My mom was watching this talk show that had a bunch of women on it whose faces had been injured—“Help! I Need Cosmetic Surgery!”—and one of them had gotten kicked or stepped on by a horse (can’t remember which now). Seems like a reindeer could do the same thing.

7. Have you ever been hurt by someone you loved? Yes.

8. Do you like piñatas? If they’re filled with candy, yes. If they’re filled with pudding, not so much.


11. What is your favorite word? Café au lait. (Is that three words or one?)

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: ?????
Sent: Tuesday, September 19, 4:03 p.m.

Dear Cole,
What’s going on? Why won’t you talk to me?

Anna

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan" <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: New mix CD.
Sent: Wednesday, September 20, 4:30 p.m.

Jordan,

I made you a new mix CD. Is there a time this evening I can bring it over?

Anna

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan" <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: RE: New mix CD.
Sent: Wednesday, September 20, 9:03 p.m.

Jordan,

Thanks for letting me bring the mix CD over tonight. It was really nice of your mom to make me dinner—especially a meatless dinner. And it was extra nice of her to let me tell her about how Cole is ignoring me, and extra-extra nice of her to tell me that I should
“get on with my life” and “not wait for him” and that “guys my age often like girls and then start acting weird to them, so I shouldn’t feel bad.”

It was also nice of you to give me another tarot card reading. I’m glad it said that I’m an independent woman who is strong enough to take care of her own problems. That made me feel a little bit better. Thanks for lending me your spare pack of tarot cards. I can’t wait to start doing my own readings.

You’re probably right: sometimes it’s hard to step out against your friends and that’s probably why he wouldn’t take any of the notes I tried to pass him in class (especially since the Poker Players kept saying, “Is she your little girlfriend now?”). So it probably doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with me, right? Right.

Anna

P.S.: Unless there is something wrong with me.

P.P.S.: And aren’t some things worth waiting for?

P.P.P.S.: How can you tell what is worth waiting for and what isn’t? I wish there were an online quiz for that.

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: mad at cole?
Sent: Wednesday, September 20, 10:07 p.m.

Elli,
Yeah, you’re right, I am mad at Cole because of how he didn’t tell me about the sign on my butt. That’s the only reason. The sign.

Anyway, can you pretty please with Gucci on top come over tomorrow and help me put together an outfit that makes me look fatter? I need to wear it to school as soon as possible so I can look non-skinny and non-boring.

And before you ask, yes this is about a boy. And, no, the boy is not Steve. It’s about someone else, only I can’t tell you who yet. It’s kind of a secret for now. Maybe I’ll be able to tell you about it soon, once he sees me in my new Elli-designed curve-alicious outfit (fingers—and toes!—crossed).

Anna
A SURVEY I TOOK
Friday, September 22, 4:32 p.m.

1. What time is it? 5:08 p.m.
2. What is your favorite day of the week? Tomorrow.
3. How do you label yourself? Hot and fantastic—hottastic!
4. How do others label you? Most (smart) people think I’m hottastic, too.
5. Do you hate being labeled? Only when someone puts a rude sign on my butt.
6. Reindeer or snowmen? Reindeer. Snowmen don’t have hearts, like some people I know.
7. Have you ever been hurt by someone you loved? Yeah, but I got over it because I am way more mature and awesome than that person is (which means that I would never call him “Klutz,” even if he knocked over my friend’s lemonade, and I would never call him “Marshmallow” either, even if all my friends were calling him that, even if he was wearing a shirt that made him look “poofy” on top—and what would I know about clothes anyway, since clearly the shirt wouldn’t make him look poofy, it would make him look curvy, which he would know because his real best friend said so when she designed the outfit for him, and she knows all about fashion, so there!).
8. Do you like piñatas? Yes. Sometimes it’s fun to hit something with a big stick.
9. Are diamonds really a girl’s best friend? No. A girl’s best friend is supposed to be a girl’s best friend. But sometimes a girl’s best friend turns out to be a jerk, like how sometimes a diamond turns out to be a rhinestone, or how sometimes at a restaurant, the waitress brings you Diet Pepsi instead of regular Pepsi, on
accident, and when you take a drink, you’re like, “Whoa, wait a sec! This tastes bitter and weird, like fake sugar!” and then you call the waitress back and have her replace your bitter, weird, fake Pepsi with a sweet, normal, real Pepsi, and then you never think about the fake Pepsi (or the rhinestone or whatever) again.


11. What is your favorite word? Hottastic!
Cole,

You are sooooooo wrong!

It’s not my fault that you didn’t send a good enough text message to Ms. White. I didn’t come up with what to say, did I? You did.

And it’s not my fault that Ms. White got suspicious. If you would have sent a better text message, one that didn’t say “L8R” at the end of it (your dad would never in a million years say “L8R”!), she may not have gotten suspicious.

And it’s not my fault that your dad happened to buy gas at Ms. White’s this evening and Ms. White happened to ask him about the text message.

And it’s not my fault that you told Ms. White you were the one who stole the money, not me. Nobody made you do it. Just like nobody made you forget to tell me Keith put a sign on my pants, and just like how nobody made you call me “Marshmallow” and “Klutz,” and just like how nobody made you ignore me for the past week.

It’s not my fault that you’re grounded for two weeks. So there.

Anna
Cole,

Fine then, tell your dad I was at Ms. White’s, too. Is that supposed to scare me or something?

Anna

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan” <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: I'm so screwed!
Sent: Friday, September 22, 8:14 p.m.

Jordan!

I am FREAKJING OUTT!!!1!!!!!

Cole’s dad foound out about him breaking into Ms. White’s gas station the other niight, and now Coles grounded, and Cole’s goin to tell his dad tht I was there, too! What shuld I do? Please respond QUICKLY! Im typing quickly!!!!!

Anna
NOT SO BAD
Saturday, September 23, 4:17 p.m.

You know, being grounded isn’t so bad. It gives you a chance to get a lot of things done:

1. Clean your room
2. Clip your toenails
3. Practice snare
4. Practice bells
5. Try to study for your band-handbook quiz
6. Give yourself a tarot card reading instead
7. Use a paint pen to draw designs on all your picture frames
8. Organize your closet by color (aren’t you impressed, Elli?)
9. Match up all the socks you’ve thrown into your sock drawer
10. Sneak into your mom’s bathroom while she’s watching TV and find the tweezers behind her face-mask goop
11. Pluck your eyebrows
12. Pluck a nose hair, just to see what it feels like (bad)
13. Pluck a tricky-to-shave behind-the-knee hair, just to see what it feels like (not as bad)
14. Plug in your mom’s leg-waxing crock-pot-looking thing to heat up the wax in it
15. Find your mom’s leg-waxing papers behind her wrinkle cream
16. Wax your legs
17. Congratulate yourself for not screaming in pain
18. Admire your yummy-smooth legs

19. Put on some of your mom’s face-mask goop

20. Peel off the hardened goop—it’s like peeling dried glue off of your hands when you were little

21. Tell your mom that you were just looking for Q-tips in her bathroom, that’s all

22. Tell her that’s not face-mask goop on your chin, it’s toothpaste from this morning
Elli,

You’ll have to tell me who wins the demo-tape show tonight, since Mom won’t let me watch TV.

What did your dad do to Cole?

Did you do anything fun today?

Gah, I’m so bored! I should work on my diorama stuff, but I’m not in the mood.

Anna

Elli,

Yeah, you are lucky you didn’t come with us to Ms. White’s that night, especially if your dad has Cole doing chores all over the place. Just think, half of those chores could have been yours! It’s good that your dad’s treating you extra nice, though, now that you’re the “good kid.” What else did he say you could buy, besides the new belt?

Anything?
I can’t believe Cole’s still mad at me. Nobody made him go with me that night and send Ms. White that stupid text.

Anna

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie" <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Bored, bored, bored.
Sent: Saturday, September 23, 11:55 p.m.

Elli,

Sorry I’m just now writing back. Mom saw me checking my e-mail before and said that I’m not allowed to be online until Monday, as if not being able to go anywhere for two weeks isn’t enough. But she’s in bed now.

No, I won’t tell you which boy I wore the curvaceous shirt for, even if you can keep a secret. Like I said, I’ll have to tell you later. Anyway, it doesn’t matter now because I hate him and he is a loser.

Anna

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie" <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Bored, bored, bored.
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 10:20 a.m.

Elli,
No way! Of course I don’t have a crush on Cole. You’re crazy. He’s my (ex-) friend, and your brother. That would be totally weird. I don’t like him in that way at all, I swear.

(Mom and Dad are out shopping right now. That’s why I can answer your e-mail.)

Anna

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From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Bored, bored, bored.
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 11:07 a.m.

Elli,

He told you he kissed me? Really?

What did he say?

Anna

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From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Bored, bored, bored.
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 11:53 a.m.

Elli,
Well, you call tell him that I shouldn’t have kissed him either. I think it was a mistake, too.

(Why would he say that?)

Anna

P.S.: I wasn’t lying when I told you I didn’t like Cole. I mean, I was lying, but it was different. I didn’t have any choice. I had to lie because it would have been too weird for you to know about it. If somebody puts a gun to your head and tells you to steal a car, then are you really stealing a car?

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Billie” <billiejeans_wv@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Bored, bored, bored.
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 12:12 p.m.

Elli,

It would so have been weird. See? I didn’t even tell you about it, and it’s still weird now. Imagine weird like this, only twelve times worse. Really, I was doing us all a big favor by not telling you. And it doesn’t matter if I had to “lie” to you a bunch of times over many weeks. It was still for a good cause. Remember? The car-stealing thing?

Why should I apologize if I didn’t do anything wrong?

Anna
P.S.: You shouldn’t bring up that thing I said about your mom haunting you. That was a million years ago. I’m so over that already. Aren’t you?

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan” <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: Advice.
Sent: Sunday, September 24, 12:12 a.m.

Jordan,

I don’t know if you got a chance to read my other e-mail yet, but things have gotten worse. Cole is still mad at me, Billie/Elli is mad at me, and on top of all that, I’m grounded for two weeks. (I’m not even supposed to use the Internet until Monday, but Mom and Dad are asleep right now.)

Please let me know if you get this. Maybe I could bring a new mix CD over, and we could talk about what’s going on.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Darcy” <darcy@glowteen.com>
Subject: Advice.
Sent: Sunday, September 23, 11:52 p.m.

Dear Darcy,
I need some help.

My two best friends are mad at me. The first friend is mad because he took the blame for something I did, even though I never told him he had to take the blame for it. Another reason he might be mad is that we hooked up a while ago—I don’t know WHY that would make him mad, but he’s been acting funny since then, especially when he’s with his friends. (I’ve heard that when guys like you, sometimes they start acting weird around you. I’ve also had a person tell me that I should forget about the first friend and get on with my life? Is that person right? Or should I wait to see if the first friend changes his mind and goes back to acting normal?)

The second friend is mad because I hooked up with the first friend and didn’t tell her about it; they’re brother and sister, which is why I didn’t let her in on the secret, since that obviously would have made things crazy-strange between us.

I feel really bad that they’re mad at me. I want to know, should I apologize to them even though I’m right?

Plus: If you wouldn’t mind, could you tell me why nasty, stuck-up girls get boyfriends even though nice, friendly girls don’t? Thanks!

Yours truly,

Anna Finnegans in Hanover, WV

P.S.: If you print my letter, could you call me “Hung Up in Hanover” instead? I don’t want anyone to know it’s me who wrote you.
BACK ONLINE, BUT STILL GROUNDED

Monday, September 25, 4:23 p.m.

Our new chair rankings were announced today:

1. Cole
2. Me
3. Keith
4. Mitch
5. Liam
6. Timothy
7. Jay

Mr. Martin passed out a new piece. Here is how the parts were divvied up by the new first-chair percussionist:

Timpani: Cole
Snare: Keith
Xylophone: Liam
Bells: Mitch
Cymbals: Timothy
Bass: Jay
Cowbell: Me
Might as well not have practiced for the chair test at all.

Cowbell. Really.

I’m going to lie in bed for a while. Hopefully, I’ll fall asleep and when I wake up this won’t seem so horrible.

**NOPE, STILL HORRIBLE**

*Monday, September 25, 8:18 p.m.*

Mom and Dad must have sensed something was wrong since I didn’t come out for dinner, because a little while ago they came to my room together to “see about me.” I kept my head under the covers, but they opened the door after I didn’t answer the knocks. When I peeked out from under the covers, Mom said, “My poor baby,” and Dad said, “Why have you been crying,” and I said, “I have not been crying” (I had), and Mom said, “Yes, you have. I can tell from your face,” and I said, “How can you tell? Because my face is pale and ugly and sideshow-freaky? Because it’s the perfect face to go with my pale and ugly and sideshow-freaky body, which is so skinny that when Billie dressed me up to look non-skinny, it made me look poofy, and all the Poker Players laughed at me, including Cole, and then, when I stomped away, I kicked Keith’s lemonade over, and it fell against the bass drum and make a big noise, and Mr. Martin found out about it, and now the whole class has to take a quiz about our handbook this week since ‘apparently, we don’t know how to follow the rules,’ and it’s all my fault, and that was just Friday, before I had to spend the whole weekend grounded. And today was even worse. Today was the chair test, and Cole beat me, and now he’s giving me bad parts,” only somewhere
in there, I started crying again, so most of what I said probably sounded more like
“Blubber-blub sniff blubber wah-wah” instead of like words.

I didn’t even get a chance to tell them about the fact that my bra (blue with cherries
on it) was showing through the “poofy” shirt because I forgot to wear my white one. And
how I had to walk around like that all day Friday. And how Jordan has totally been
blowing me off.

Mom sat on the side of my bed and started saying some stuff she’d heard on TV
about self-esteem or peer pressure or something, but I didn’t want to listen to her since
those shows about self-esteem, peer pressure, etc., get on my nerves, and since I hadn’t
meant to say all that stuff to them anyway, it just kind of came out (insert footage of a
fiery volcano and tiny little villagers running away here). Finally, Mom got the hint and
made me a quiche instead (she’s been watching a lot of cooking shows lately), and Dad
gave me twenty dollars (!) and said I could buy myself “a little something” with it
because “I’m a good kid” who “deserves a treat sometimes.”

I asked if I was a good enough kid to not be grounded anymore, but Dad said, “Nice
try” and took the money away!

I wanted to eat the whole quiche, since it would probably fatten me up, but I could
only cram in half of it. I should study for the handbook quiz, but I think I’ll put on my
pajamas and get back into bed. Maybe in the morning it won’t feel so bad.

**OR MAYBE IT WILL**
**Tuesday, September 26, 5:59 a.m.**

Still as bad as ever.
Also bad: I have a vocabulary list due in Ms. Remington’s class today, and I completely forgot about it. I’ll have to do as much as I can on the bus to school. Oh, and BTW, I still haven’t done much of anything for the diorama. I am so screwed. There’s no way I can get this diorama furniture finished in time.

Not quite as bad as all that but still pretty stupid and completely my fault: the band-handbook quiz is tomorrow.

**THERE’S NOT ROOM IN THIS TOWN FOR THE BOTH OF US**

*Tuesday, September 26, 4:46 p.m.*

Well, what do we have here?

I was studying the band handbook on the bus, when I came across this thing that said if you’re not happy with the chair you’ve been assigned, you can challenge the person whose chair is before you. So, if you’re fourth chair, you can have a trumpet-off, or a flute-off, or a percussion-off, or whatever, with the person who’s third chair. It’s like one of those duels in the Old West.

I’m second chair.

Cole’s first chair.

(Insert stare-down, whistly, cowboy music here.)
Steve,

Sure, I’ll come over. That’s not a bad idea. I can help you with making the little tiny wallpaper for the diorama, and you can help me with the furniture. We’ll get it done twice as fast that way. I’m desperate to get it finished.

What time should I show up tomorrow? Maybe after dinner? Around 7?

Wait, I’m still grounded. Let me go ask Mom. Since it’s for school, she’ll probably say yes . . .

Success! She said yes! See you tomorrow!

Anna

Jordan,

Billie/Elli is still mad at me. She keeps avoiding me at school, and she never calls or e-mails. What should I do?
She’s probably even madder now that I’ve officially told Mr. Martin (our band director) that I want to challenge Cole for first chair. Mr. Martin didn’t announce it to the class or anything, but Billie/Elli must have read about it on my blog or else her dad told her, because she kept turning around and glaring at me during band, and when the bell rang, she came back and said, “What’d you have to go and challenge Cole like that for?”

I tried to give myself a tarot reading about the whole thing, and the tarot told me to do nothing (because I got the Hanging Man card). At least, I think that’s what the Hanging Man card means. But how can I do nothing? Why didn’t I get the death card (which, IMHO, would be a sign that I should kill the two of them)?

Can I come over to your house and have you do a reading on me instead? I know it’s supposed to be bad luck to do two tarot readings on somebody in one day, but maybe we could do it this evening anyway?

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummgirl@kln.net>
To: “Jordan” <femmefatale@kln.net>
Subject: RE: Elli/Billie.
Sent: Thursday, September 28, 6:03 p.m.

Jordan,

IF YOU DIDN’T WANT TO TALK TO ME ANYMORE, WHY DIDN’T YOU JUST SAY SO???
My problems are NOT “childish.” I am very mature, thank you very much. More mature than you. I would never be nice to someone just because my mom told me to and because they gave me mix CDs. That’s what childish is.

Go ahead and don’t talk to me tomorrow. See if I care. Here’s a hint: I won’t.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: RE: your furniture turned out good
Sent: Thursday, September 28, 9:13 p.m.

Steve,

Thanks. Your diorama wallpaper looks awesome, too.

Anna

P.S.: I can’t believe you beat me at Guitar Hero. I usually do way better than that. I must have been tired or something.
ONCE I'M RICH AND FAMOUS . . . (SIX DAYS TILL CHALLENGE)
Thursday, September 28, 9:20 p.m.

. . . I’m going to drive my orange Porsche over to Jordan’s house, walk into her bedroom without knocking (because when you’re famous, you can do that kind of thing), and step on her mix CDs with my crazy-colored sneakers. And she’ll be like, “Oh, stop it, stop stepping on my beloved CDs,” and I’ll be like, “Too bad, so sad, mwah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha. You shouldn’t have started calling me Banana Finnegan again, huh? Serves you right, two-face.” (Insert bass-thumping, butt-kicking club music here.) Then I’m going to go over to The Annoying Kid’s house and give him $500,000 so he won’t talk to me ever again, because this morning I was stuck talking to him in the bus-stop shelter long enough to last me a lifetime (and when I say “talking to him,” I really mean “listening to him while trying to keep from rolling my eyes”—how long can one kid talk about tae kwon do class?).

At least I got my part of the diorama done over at Steve’s house. We played Guitar Hero at his house, too, and it was SO MUCH FUN!!! I had a GREAT TIME!!! He’s pretty much the best Guitar Hero player I’ve ever seen. On the bus this morning, we helped each other study for Ms. Remington’s next reading quiz, too. (She always comes up with such picky questions, it doesn’t matter if you’ve read the big fifty zillion times, you still won’t remember half of the answers.) All that will give me more time to practice for the challenge, especially since I’m grounded and can’t go anywhere anyway. I’ll be challenging him on snare, on a piece I picked out of our practice book, “Down the Mississippi.”

Maybe I’ll start the countdown to the challenge: six days to go.
WISH YOU WERE HERE? (STILL SIX DAYS TILL CHALLENGE)
Thursday, September 28, 10:30 p.m.

My dad was playing Cruise Ship a little while ago, and I got to thinking, when you’re grounded, it helps to think of your house as a cruise ship. If you do that, it’s almost fun. You can eat your dinner and pretend your microwaved green beans (out of a can) are really fancy green beans almandine. You can listen to Foxboro and pretend that they’re on the cruise ship with you, playing on a stage. (Bonus: If jump around and do aerobics while your listen to Foxboro, and if you open your window to get a breeze in, it’s almost like you’re in an exercise class on the deck of the ship, with the sea air blowing on you.) You can soak in the bath tub until your fingertips wrinkle and pretend you’re in a spa, especially if you put cucumber slices on your eyes and steal some more of your mom’s face-mask goop. You can braid your hair and pretend you’re in a hair salon. (Bonus: If you light some candles while your braid your hair and sit Indian style in front of the mirror, SURPRISE—you’re meditating!) You can pretend the reason you don’t hear from your friends is that you’re so far away, out in the middle of the ocean, having a great time.

Really, it is a great time. Sometimes it’s nice to have time to yourself. It gives you time to think about important things like, what is the meaning of life? And, when I start my own band one day, will I call them the Finnegan Project or the Banana Suits? And, why do mean people win while nice people lose? And, how can the nice people cause the mean people to lose for once? And, if I could do any crime and not get caught, what would it be and who would I do it to?
So, like I said, being grounded is just like being on vacation. I’m having such an
awesome time, I can hardly stand it.

NEW THINGS I’M ADDING TO MY BIRTHDAY WISHLIST (FIVE DAYS TILL
CHALLENGE)
Friday, September 29, 6:17 p.m.

1) A drum set (not a new thing, but I REALLY want one)
2) A down comforter
3) A down pillow
4) A nice robe
5) Comfy slippers
6) Face-mask goop
7) A noise machine that sounds like the ocean

I WISH I WERE DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI INSTEAD OF HERE (STILL FIVE DAYS TILL
CHALLENGE)
Friday, September 29, 7:50 p.m.

I was practicing “Down the Mississippi” really loud when Dad yelled at me to be
quiet. I yelled back, “If you’d let me leave the house, I could practice somewhere else
and not bother you.” He said, “Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just use your practice pad.”

Oh well. It was worth a shot.

WHAT’S YOUR FILM NOIR NAME? (STILL FIVE DAYS TILL CHALLENGE)
Friday, September 29, 8:46 p.m.
I found this thing online that tells you how to come up with your film noir name. You take the name of your pet as your first name (if you don’t have a pet now, then a former pet; it helps if the pet is the same gender as you) and your favorite tree as your last name. Your nickname is “the” followed by your most cherished possession. That makes me Ginger “the Snare” Willow (since Ginger is closer to being my pet than Sassafras will ever be).

You should figure out your film noir name and post it here. It could be fun!

WHAT HALLOWEEN CANDY ARE YOU? (THREE DAYS TILL CHALLENGE)
Sunday, October 1, 10:44 a.m.

OK, if nobody wants to do their film noir name, then how about taking this quiz? It tells you what kind of Halloween candy you are. I’m a candy apple because I’m “sweet but substantial.” (But whoever got a candy apple from trick-or-treating? Too bad I didn’t grow up where the writers of that quiz did. I got a lot of cheapo Smartees and candy corn and stuff.)

What kind of candy does it say you are?
Steve,

Yes, I’d love to come over!!! We can totally work on the diorama some more!!! Just let me ask Mom!!! I’ll let you know what she says as soon as possible!!!

Anna

P.S.: Socks “The Rifle” Cypress is a good film noir name.

P.P.S.: Just because the quiz called you candy corn doesn’t mean I think you’re cheapo. Stop trying to guilt-trip me.

Cole and Billie,

Only immature babies send people e-mails just because they want to brag about things.

So what if I lost? I’d rather be second chair and a mature person than first chair (or the sister of the first-chair person) and an immature baby like the two of you are.
Steve,

I still can’t believe I lost the challenge. I just can’t believe it. I thought I did really well—practically perfect. How did Cole beat me?

And even if I did lose, the Poker Players (and Cole) didn’t have to make faces at me like that. Billie didn’t have to make faces, either. Plus: Cole and Billie sent me a mean, we’re-better-than-you kind of e-mail.

I hate them! I do! WHY DID I LOSE?!!

Anna

Steve,

From: “Anna" <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Steve” <steve_20@kln.net>
Subject: I can't believe I just thought of this.
Sent: Wednesday, October 4, 6:32 p.m.
It’s so obvious, I should have thought of this sooner: Mr. Martin must have picked Cole because Cole’s HIS SON! He HAD to pick him! I mean, how could he NOT pick him?

That must be it. It’s the only logical reason. I practiced nonstop (FOR DAYS!!!). I only messed up that one part at the end, when I skipped a line and had to go back. And the accents I missed at the beginning weren’t anything important; I bet Mr. Martin didn’t even notice. But I heard Cole when his turn came, and he messed up the flamadiddles in that one hard measure I was telling you about, so why did he beat me? Why?

Anna
Steve came over to my house today so we could make more stuff for the diorama. We’re totally going to get an A on it. We made a little tablecloth to go on the little dining room table and little books to go in the little bookcase and little curtains to go on the little windows, and we made each little room have a different kind of little wallpaper.

We got a lot of work done, really, but one time Mom came into my room anyway and told us we should be “doing homework, not socializing” since I’m grounded.

I said, “We are doing homework.”

She said, “Then why can I hear you laughing all the way in the kitchen?”

I said, “We are doing homework.”

“Then why are you holding that wad of paper over your candle like that? You want to catch the house on fire, Anna Marie Finnegan? Do you?”

“It’s not a wad of paper. It’s a miniature book for the diorama. And it isn’t on fire. I’m holding it way above the flame, like this.”

Mom started doing her deep-breathing thing then. (She learned about it on Healthy Living Every Day, with Dr. Graham.) “Why are you holding it way above the flame, like that?” Mom asked.

I said, “Because I’m a book burner.” I looked at Steve out of the corner of my eye, and he was looking at me out of the corner of his eye. He was grinning. We both burst out laughing, and Mom took the candle away and left, all stompy and huffy-like.

I don’t know what her problem is. She acts like I’m some little kid who doesn’t know when something’s on fire or not.
FIVE REASONS WHY TEXAS IS GREAT (ACCORDING TO STEVE)
Thursday, October 5, 9:22 p.m.

1. It has all different kinds of land: desert, mountains, plains . . .
2. It’s warm most of the time.
3. People there are friendly.
4. Austin is there.
5. You can order alligator tail in a restaurant (not “great” for me, obviously, but if you’re into the whole carnivore thing . . .)
Steve,

Yeah, but like I told you on the bus this morning, I don’t want to get anybody in trouble, even if Mr. Martin DID play favorites with Cole. If I complained to Principal Radcliff, it would be the end of the world.

Anna

P.S.: Forgot to tell you this: Sassafras has learned some of Mom’s curse words! Ha ha! That’s what she gets for swearing every time she messes up when she’s decorating the birds’ room.

Cole,

What are you talking about? I never said anything about your dad playing favorites with you. That’s crazy.
Steve,

Cole found out about how I was saying his dad was playing favorites. I could die I’m so embarrassed. How do you think he found out? I know Jocelyn and Kimberley were sitting kind of near us on the bus this morning, but we were talking really quiet, and they didn’t look like they were listening in.

Do you think they were listening in?

Nah, they probably couldn’t have heard us over everybody else talking and the sound of the engine and stuff.

Do you think they might have told Cole? But why would they talk to Cole? Maybe they’d talk to Billie, though. Ohmigosh, do you think they told Andrea, and Andrea told Billie, and Billie told Cole?

Anna
Steve,

I know! Andrea WOULD do something snarky like that! When I’m rich and famous, I’m going to stop by her house, too!

Anna

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From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Rob” <car.number8@kln.net>
Subject: RE: steve
Sent: Saturday, October 7, 11:20 p.m.

Rob,

Are you for real? Does Steve really want me to go out with him or is this a joke?

Anna
I was sitting on the bus today with my new boyfriend, Steve, and he asked me if I wanted to come over and play *Guitar Hero* later, since now I’m not grounded anymore and don’t have to worry about saying it’s for the diorama. I was about to say yes when this kid behind us passed me a note and said, “This is for Anna, from Andrea, back there.” Andrea was sitting about six seats behind him, waving at me with Jocelyn and Kimberley. I took the note (because I pretty much had to), but I didn’t want to see what she’d written inside of it. She’d folded it to be in the shape of a dog’s head. She’d written “To: Anna” on one ear and “From: Andrea” on the other, and she’d drawn on a nose, mouth, eyes, and whiskers. Steve kept bugging me to open it, so I did. Inside, the note said, “Dear Anna, Is Steve your boyfriend now? Please check one.” Under that, Andrea had drawn a box for “yes,” a box for “no,” a box for “no, but I want him to be,” a box for “maybe,” and a box for “I don’t know.”

I didn’t really want to check any of the boxes because I thought Andrea might be playing a trick on me, but Steve took a pen out of his book bag, drew an X in the “yes” box, folded the dog back up, and sent it back to Andrea. Then he held my hand, and Andrea and Jocelyn and Kimberley started giggling (not because he was holding my hand—they couldn’t see that—but because of the note). Still, everybody started looking at us (at least it felt like they were), so after I let Steve hold my hand for fifteen seconds, I took my hand away. It’s too bad people can’t be more mature about PDA and have to be all giggly/starey about it.
It was really brave of him to tell Andrea that he’s my boyfriend instead of being afraid of what she’d think. Some other people might not be brave enough to do that. Some other people might start treating you weird after you do PDA with them, but not Steve because he is way cooler than those people.

Anyway, Steve’s mom is going to come pick me up in a little bit to take me over to his house. I’d better get ready.

MORE ABOUT MY NEW BOYFRIEND
Monday, October 9, 9:31 p.m.

Here are some more facts about my new boyfriend, in case you’re interested:

1) His mom is really nice and made a big pot of (delicious) bean soup since she knew I was coming.
2) His dad’s southern accent is even more obvious than his.
3) He keeps his room very neat.
4) He has a Keith Urban poster that was signed by Keith Urban himself.
5) He has every video game ever made.
6) He’s the best Guitar Hero player I’ve ever seen. (I may have mentioned that already.)
7) He has a remote control car that looks just like Tony Stewart’s car (that’s his favorite NASCAR driver). He can drive it around his house better than I can. I keep running it into the fireplace and the staircase when he tried to show me
how to use it. One time I even ran it into his dad’s telescope, and I was so scared I’d knock it over!

8) When I told him my birthday was in six days, he wrote it on his calendar so he wouldn’t forget it.

9) His birthday is February 2. (That makes me The Older Woman!)

I had a lot of fun at Steve’s house, but now I’m home again and I should probably practice for band, even if I don’t have a chair test or challenge or anything coming up. Don’t want to get rusty.

I WAS THINKING . . .
Monday, October 9, 9:58 p.m.

Wouldn’t it be cool if I could be in the Banana Suits right now and have a bunch of my friends be in the band with me (oh yeah, I decided to call it the Banana Suits, not the Finnegan Project, just so you know). I could play drums, obviously, and maybe I would sing, too, and Steve could probably learn how to play guitar, since he’s already so good at Guitar Hero. Now all we need is a piano player and a tuba player and an accordion player and a harmonica player, and we could be as good as Foxboro. Wouldn’t it be fun if the Banana Suits got to play at the Literary Characters Dance, and everybody loved us, and there happened to be a record producer in the crowd, and he wanted to sign us right then? It’d be just like in the movies.
Billie,

What? Why would your dad do that? It’s bad enough he yelled at you in band class yesterday for talking too loud to Diana, but why does he have to yell at you at home for it, too? That seems very unfair. And I think you’re right—your dad would never yell at Cole like that. (Remember when he and the Poker Players got in trouble for playing that Haymaker card game? You dad didn’t call him out for that, did he? He just got onto all the Poker Players, which isn’t the same thing.) Now you see what I mean about how he plays favorites with Cole. He even does it against YOU.

Anna

P.S.: I don’t know when Steve’s going to ask me to the dance. We haven’t talked about it yet. But, sure, you can help me with my costume if he does ask me. And, sorry, I don’t want him and me to go as Cinderella and Prince Charming. I want to go as a book burner, like I said before.

P.P.S.: Thanks for buying those chocolate turtles for me. And it was really nice of you to wrap them up pretty like that.

P.P.P.S.: I’m glad we’re not fighting anymore either.
Billie,

I don’t know, he can be a book burner, too, I guess. Or maybe he can be a book and I can be “burning” him! Ha ha!

Why do we have to “dress like a couple” anyway? No offense, but that’s too much like something Andrea “Matchy-Matchy” Ogilvy would do—her and her Shakespeare-costume idea, I mean. Anyway, he hasn’t asked me yet, so I’m not going to stress about it.

Anna

P.S.: Yeah, I was kind of fibbing before when I told you and Cole I hadn’t said anything about your dad favoring him. I couldn’t help it though. I didn’t want to make you two mad or get anybody in trouble. Anybody would have lied in that case, don’t you think?

P.P.S.: You’re not going to tell Cole I was lying, are you?
Elli,

Good! It would only hurt his feelings if he knew, anyway.

Anna
FALL IS IN THE AIR  
Tuesday, October 10, 6:31 p.m.

I was at Ms. White’s gas station today, and she was wearing earrings shaped like candy corn, and it reminded me of how Halloween is coming up and how that Halloween-candy quiz told Steve he’s “candy corn.” The leaves are starting to turn. The air is starting to feel cool. A bunch of houses already have their Halloween decorations up. Yup, Halloween is getting close. I mean, really close. So if anybody wants to make any plans for Halloween, they should start on them now because it’ll be here before you know it.

WHAT’S GOING ON? (16 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)  
Wednesday, October 11, 4:03 p.m.

Maybe it’s because Halloween is getting nearer and nearer, but people are starting to act really weird lately. At the bus stop this morning, Jordan and the other High School Kids came up with a new name for me: “Slim.” On the bus, Ms. Silver didn’t yell at any of us to “Sit! Down!” when we were slow (which we were). And when I sat with Steve, Andrea “Zombie” Ogilvy ran up from a few seats back and sat in the seat right in front of us. And Ms. Silver didn’t yell at her for that, either, even though we’re not supposed to switch seats.

Once the bus got moving, Zombie turned around in her seat and said hi, and Steve said hi back, and I didn’t say anything.

“Hey, Anna,” she said, “how are things going with you and Steve?”

I said, “Fine.”
“Good. You two are really cute together.”

“Thanks?”

“I think I’m going to break up with Keith. We’re not cute together at all. He’s getting on my nerves, you know what I mean? And he wants me to be pirate wench at the Literary Characters Dance.”

“Uh . . . OK.”

“Hey, you know what I heard about you, Anna? I heard that you can read tarot cards.”

“Kind of.”

“That’s so cool. Can you do a reading for me?”

I looked at Steve, to see if he was smirking or frowning or smiling or what, but his face wasn’t doing anything special. So I told Zombie, “Tomorrow I’ll bring my cards with me.” Then I said, “If you bring me five dollars.” Then I felt myself blushing because I couldn’t believe I’d said that last part—I didn’t even realize I was going to say it until it had already come out of my mouth. I thought Zombie would laugh at me, or at least turn around and flip her hair at me and not say anything, but instead she said sure.

I’m kind of afraid to do it. She probably won’t give me any money and will make fun of me somehow.

But what if she does give me money? A reading only takes, like, five minutes. Can you imagine earning five dollars for five minutes?

**TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS! (15 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**
Thursday, October 12, 8:55 p.m.
The only thing better than earning five dollars for five minutes of telling people their futures is earning twenty-five dollars for twenty-five minutes of telling people their futures.

First I did Andrea’s on the bus. Jocelyn and Kimberley got theirs done when we got off the bus. And Karen got hers done at lunch because she’d heard about it from Andrea in English class.

With forty more tarot readings, I could afford a drum set on eBay.

After school I went to Steve’s house to play Guitar Hero. He also showed me this game where you’re supposed to hunt deer, but Steve spent most of the game walking around in the woods, looking for the deer. The scenery was really pretty.

We’re going to the Literary Characters Dance together. We decided to go as Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf.
Elli,

I know! It WAS a stupid game! Steve must have spent an hour just making his character walk around and around and around, and then this deer came into view, and—BLAM!—he shot it. And when he shot it, the deer actually made this little grunt sound before it fell to the ground. That game is sad and stupid at the same time. I don’t know how he can like it so much.

And why does he think I would want to drive around his remote control car anyway? I tried it and all, but it was boring, too. I mean, you’re driving around a little car all over the marble floor in your living room. Big deal.

I tried to get him to listen to a Foxboro CD, but he didn’t like it. And he keeps trying to get me to listen to Keith Urban, but it’s just not my kind of thing. And when I said I wanted to go as a book burner to the dance, I could tell he didn’t like that idea. That’s when he said, “Why don’t we go as Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf?”

But he’s nice to me, and he has me over all the time, and he holds my hand even if people are looking, and he checked “yes” on that note Andrea passed up to us the other day, and he asked me to the dance and everything.

Anna
P.S.: Yeah, I shouldn’t trust Andrea “Two-Faced” Ogilvy, you’re right. But why is she being so nice to me? It’s so weird. (Insert Jeopardy theme song here.)
WHAT I GOT FOR MY BIRTHDAY (12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Sunday, October 15, 3:13 p.m.

1) From Mom and Dad: a sequined scarf, a wireless keyboard, a green book bag with A.M.F. stitched onto it in orange, scripty letters

2) From Grandma: fifty dollars (now I have ninety-eight dollars to put toward a drum set if I add in the money I already had in my cheetah bank!)

3) From Elli: a “Happy Happy Birthday Baby” handbag with fourteen different-colored buttons on it (since I’m fourteen now) and a Foxboro poster with my face pasted over the drummer’s

4) From Cole: a happy-birthday e-card (it had cartoon cats in party hats, meowing “Happy Birthday to You” until a cartoon old lady threw a boot at them, they all ran away, and the fence suddenly said “Have a Purr-fact Birthday” on it), and an I’m-sorry e-card (it had clouds that floated onto the screen and spelled “I’m Sorry!”)

5) From Steve: a Keith Urban CD

WHAT TAROT CARD ARE YOU? (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Sunday, October 15, 4:14 p.m.

You are The Chariot card. You crave achievement, and you’re willing to work hard to get it. Creativity and motivation are your strengths. New inspirations lie ahead. Keep your life in balance, and you will be triumphant. (Click [here](#) to take the quiz.)

HOW PSYCHIC ARE YOU? (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Sunday, October 15, 4:29 p.m.
This quiz looks like it’s really just an ad disguised as a quiz, but still:

You are somewhat in tune with your psychic abilities. If one of your friends has lost an earring, you can probably tell here where to look for it, “on a hunch,” and it will be there. Or sometimes you can guess ahead of time what song will come on the radio. Using the techniques described in our book, you can develop your psychic abilities to their full potential.

**HAPPY HAPPY BIRTHDAY BABY (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**  
Sunday, October 15, 5:10 p.m.

I’ve hung the handbag Elli made me on the doorknob of my closet door. I was trying to take more quizzes just now, but I kept looking at the bag. Each of the buttons is different, and I keep trying to decide which one is my favorite. I think the gold one with the leaf pattern is. Or maybe the glittery, peacock-feathery one. Hard to say. And the red, chunky, wooden one is cool, too.

I love how they’re all different colors. I love when things don’t match but don’t exactly clash either—when they just sort of go together.

Oh! You know what would go really well with this handbag? Crazy-colored sneakers with crazy-colored laces (even if they ARE like something from the ’80s). Only new shoes might be kind of expensive, especially since I’m saving up for a drum set. I bet shoelaces don’t cost must, though.

**SHOELACES!!! (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**  
Sunday, October 15, 7:44 p.m.
I went into the living room and bugged Mom to take me to the store (I didn’t have to bug her too much since it’s my birthday). Now we’re back.

I got two sets of shoelaces: one that’s yellow with red squiggles and one that has ivy printed on it! I just put the red-squiggle ones in my white canvas sneakers, and I’m going to get out my markers and color on the shoes—designs and stuff. They’re old shoes, so it’s OK if I mess them up.

**SHOES!!! (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**
*Sunday, October 15, 8:21 p.m.*

OHMIGOSH, MY SHOES LOOK AWESOME! THEY LOOK LIKE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS!

**MORE SHOES!!! (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**
*Sunday, October 15, 11:27 p.m.*

While Mom was watching some show about growing your own herb garden, I snuck into her room and stole another old pair of canvas sneakers from the back of her closet. They were under a bunch of old sweatshirts, with my old dart set (which my mom took away from me a while ago because I kept throwing the darts at things to see if they’d stick). The shoes are missing their laces, and one even has a little hole in the toe, so I know she won’t miss them.

When I heard her turn off the TV and go to bed, I put the ivy shoelaces in her (now my) shoes and started coloring them. Only instead of just random designs, I tried to draw
the Chariot tarot card on one (a guy in a chariot being pulled by two lions) and the Fool card on the other (a guy standing at the edge of a cliff and looking out at the ocean, or maybe he’s about to dance off of the cliff, it’s hard to tell—either way, he looks pretty happy to me). Only instead of guys, I made them girls. LOL! Why should the guys do all the chariot-driving and ocean-looking and cliff-dancing?

**MORE AND MORE AND MORE SHOES!!! (12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**

Monday, October 16, 12:36 a.m.

I got out my brown suede sneakers and wrote “Anna” again and again around the bottom of one, and on the other one I wrote “Finnegan” again and again around the bottom. (As kind of a joke, I drew a banana on the bottom of each one. Get it? Banana Thinnegan? I’m thin like a banana—thin like Audrey Hepburn?)

**PINCH ME, I MUST BE DREAMING (STILL 12 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**

Monday, October 16, 7:25 a.m.

Why did I draw on my shoes like that?! What was I thinking? They look ridiculous! But the bus is coming in twenty minutes and I’ve got to wear something on my feet. Too bad it’s not raining out. Then I could wear my rain boots. Wait, I’m going to try on the rain boots. Maybe they can pass as real shoes . . .

Nope. They’re definitely rain-boot looking.

I’ll wear the suede sneakers with my name written on them. At least their laces look normal and they don’t have a lot of writing on them. Why did I do this?!?!?!!??
Elli,

Thanks! I like my shoes, too! At first I felt like an idiot walking out of the house in them, but by the time I got to the bus stop, I was kind of strutting around, like, “Look at my shoes! Look at my name! I have a joke drawn on the bottom of these shoes, and you don’t even know about it! I have a secret!” And when Lexi said, “Hi there, Slim,” snarkily when I walked up, I said, “What happened to ‘Banana Finnegan’?” and lifted up one foot to show them the banana I’d drawn. Jordan laughed a little bit at that, even though the other High School Kids just rolled their eyes. But at least they all left me alone for the rest of the morning. (The only bad thing was Kyle, The Annoying Kid, kept saying he wanted to see my shoes. I just thought of this: I hope I wasn’t as annoying to Jordan as Kyle is to me. Nah, couldn’t have been. Could I?)

Anyway, I’m glad you don’t think my shoes look “like the ’80s.” And sure, if you give me a pair of sneakers, I’ll make you some, too.

Anna
Cole,

Thanks for noticing.

The picture on my left shoe today was the tarot card called the Chariot. The picture on the right shoe was the tarot card called the Fool.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: your shoes
Sent: Tuesday, October 17, 5:18 p.m.

Cole,

Yes, I really have been doing tarot readings. (I made five more dollars today.)

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: your shoes
Sent: Tuesday, October 17, 6:03 p.m.

Cole,
Of course I’m going to charge you for it! If I gave you a free reading, then I’d have to give everybody a free one.

Anna
If I wouldn’t have drawn on my shoes, I don’t think it would be this bad.

Let me explain:

I brought my tarot cards to school today to give Cole a reading. This evening, I was going through my book bag at the kitchen table, trying to find my math book. I found my math book fine, but when I pulled it out, the tarot cards came with it. The box of cards had gotten stuck between the book’s pages, so when I took out the book, they fell on the table. And guess who was sitting at the other end of the table, peeling potatoes into a big yellow bowl? My mom.

Sometimes, even having a book bag that zips will not save you.

I tried to pick up the cards before she could see them, but it was too late: Mom sees everything. She asked me what they were, and I tried to convince her they were regular cards, but Mom made me show them to her, and she said, “You know how I feel about these things, Anna.” (I wanted to say: “Yeah, I know. You feel about them the way the people on TV say you should feel about them.) She made me hand the cards over to her (after I’d been starting to make good money, too!), and she said, “What’s on your feet?”

I looked down. I was still wearing the tarot-card shoes—her tarot card shoes. The good news is, I don’t think Mom knew they were tarot card designs. The bad news is, she knew they were her old shoes, and she got so mad. She said I’d disrespected her by taking her property. She said, “First stealing from Ms. White’s and now all this. I don’t know what I’m going to do with you, Anna Marie Finnegan.”
Then she said I was grounded. I asked her when I was grounded until, and she said, “Until I feel like saying you’re not grounded anymore.” How unfair! I might even miss the dance if she doesn’t “feel like” setting me free until after it’s happened!

I went to my room and turned up Foxboro really loud and started trying to drum along, wishing I had the cymbals and bass drum and stuff to go with my snare drum, so I could hit the cymbals instead of just doing rim shots and pretending. Dad told me to be quiet and use my practice pad instead, and I started imagining that if I had a music video one day, it might have a girl in her room who’s getting yelled out for being too loud while she’s dancing around and singing. (Maybe the song could be called “Too Loud.” Hmmmm . . .)

I knew that if I ever wanted that video to happen, I would have to have a real drum set, so I could really learn how to play, and I was so mad that I went online and pulled up my old ideas for making money, and I said to myself, “I’ll sell my TV! I never watch it anyway! I’ll sell my TV, and Mom and Dad can’t stop me because it’s mine, and maybe I’ll make enough money to buy the drum set, and then Dad will really have to tell me to be quiet.”

I got out my practice pad, turned to the hardest lesson in the practice book, even harder than “Down the Mississippi,” and tried to get through it. Real percussionists have to practice even when they don’t feel like it, if they want to make good songs and sell CDs. I mean, so what if your sneakers look cool? If you suck at playing, the band will throw you out anyway. They’ll just get somebody else to do it—or even use computerized drumbeat instead, like in the songs Elli likes (no offense, Elli!).
Besides, it was kind of fun to play AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE on the practice pad, and do it as close to my bedroom door as I could, because Dad could probably still hear me on it, and if he’d have said anything to me about being loud (he didn’t), I could have said, “But I’m using the practice pad, like you said.”

Anyway, I just finished writing an ad for selling my TV. I’m going to put it in the paper: “For sale: One 13-inch color television with remote. Five years old. Used to belong to annoying parents, but works well. Great picture. Price: $50. Call 555-2851. Ask for Anna.”

PRACTICING (STILL 10 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE—NOT THAT IT MATTERS ANYMORE)
Wednesday, October 18, 10:07 p.m.

Forgot to mention this before, because of getting grounded and all.

This morning, I got out my drumstick on the bus this morning and practiced the hard song on my lap, but then Steve said, “I’m talking to you.”

I said, “What?”

“I’m talking to you.”

“Oh, sorry, I thought you were talking to Andrea” (she was sitting in front of us again). “I wasn’t paying attention.”

“I was talking to both of you. About Guitar Hero. I got past the ‘Crossroads’ level last night.” He tried to hold my hand, but Andrea was looking at us, which made it feel weird, but also I was busy practicing, so I just kept playing until he took his hand away. (I’m thinking: Maybe that was kind of mean of me. I didn’t want to be mean. I just wanted to get through the song.)
I could tell he got a little annoyed at that, so I said, “I’m almost able to play this piece all the way through without stopping to stare at the notes for a long time.”

“But you’re still looking at the notes,” said Andrea.

“I know, but I’m not staring at them.” (I kept trying to play through all of this.)

“What?” said Andrea.

“You wouldn’t understand,” I said. Then I realized how snarky I sounded, so I tried to explain: “It’s like when you’re playing Guitar Hero—like how if you get really close to finishing a song and then you mess up near the end of it and the crowd boos you off the stage, you just have to play it again until you get it right, because you’re so close.”

“I don’t play Guitar Hero,” said Andrea.

“Of course you don’t,” I said.

Then I let Steve hold my hand for a whole thirty seconds before I started practicing again. I know it was thirty seconds. I counted. (Not that you’re a bad hand-holder, Steve! You’re an excellent hand-holder!!)

**NOT GROUNDED ANYMORE (9 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**

*Thursday, October 19, 6:55 a.m.*

Maybe I shouldn’t sell my TV. I haven’t sent the ad to the paper yet.

But I don’t really watch it a lot, and I can always use the TV in the living room or in the birds’ room, whichever one Mom or Dad isn’t watching at the time. And I would use the drum set more than I would use the TV.

Maybe it’s like how it felt stupid to wear my crazy sneakers, but once I put them on and walked around in them, it felt really cool.
Or maybe it is just stupid.

**WHO CARES IF IT’S STUPID? (STILL 9 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**
**Thursday, October 19, 11:05 a.m.**

I’m going to walk to the newspaper office and drop off the ad when I get home from school. Mom ungrounded me, so she won’t care if I say I’m going for a walk. She’ll just think I’m going to Ms. White’s. She should just be happy that I took out the part about “annoying parents.”
Hi Steve,

Sorry I’m just now responding to your forward. That video of the dog really WAS amazing. I never knew a dog could catch a Frisbee like that.

I finished that song in the practice book, and now I’m working on another one. For the past couple days, Mom has kept yelling to my room, “Are you on the Internet?” before she tries to make a phone call or get online in the office. I kept saying no, because I was working on drumming instead, and yesterday she came in my room and said, “Are you OK?” I told her I was just practicing, and she said, “All right,” and shook her head like I’m crazy. Mom doesn’t understanding anything, I swear.

Anna
NEWSPAPER (6 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Sunday, October 22, 11:25 a.m.

You should have seen my mom’s face when she got the newspaper off the front stoop this morning and started reading it. I was making toast when I heard her clank down her coffee cup and yell “Anna.”

“Why is your name and our phone number in the classified section?” she asked.

“Because I’m selling my TV.”

“I can see that. Why?”

“I want to use the money to buy a drum set.”

Mom told me I couldn’t sell it (she doesn’t understand ANYTHING!) and then she told me to go to my room. Not long after that, I started hearing her and dad fighting about money in the kitchen again. (Dad kept saying things like, “Do you think money grows on trees?” and Mom kept saying things like, “Why have money if you can’t enjoy it?”) I started practicing again to drown out the noise.

They are so obnoxious sometimes.

P.S.: Something good: while they were fighting, I snuck into their bedroom and found where Mom hid my tarot cards—under the sweatshirts, where she kept my darts set.

HORSE TEETH (5 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Monday, October 23, 4:18 p.m.
When I got on the bus today, Andrea “Horse Teeth” Ogilvy was already sitting with Steve. Steve must have said something funny because Horse Teeth was laughing and laughing with her mouth wide open.

At first I wanted to punch her, right in her horsey mouth, or at least glare at her a little bit. But a rich and famous percussionist wouldn’t care about Horse Teeth sitting with Steve, so I just waved at the two of them like nothing was wrong and sat in a seat by myself (which was nice and roomy, by the way) and practiced more of the new song in the book. Horse Teeth passed me a note—she folded it in the shape of a bird—but I wouldn’t take it, so the kid in front of me ended up passing it back up to Horse Teeth. Horse Teeth looked over at me, and she looked really confused.

**DANCE (4 DAYS TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE—NOT THAT IT MATTERS ANYMORE)**
*Tuesday, October 24, 4:18 p.m.*

We did our diorama presentation in English today. (Our group got an A, probably because of all the furniture I made!) At the end of class, Horse Teeth came up to Steve and started telling him what a great job we did—blabbering on and on. Not that I was surprised. It’s obvious that she likes him, now that she’s sitting with him on the bus and all.

Steve’s friend Rob found me in the locker hall at the end of the day. I was getting out my science book (for homework), and Rob tapped me on the shoulder. “Hey,” he said.

“Hey,” I said.

“Hey,” he said.

“You already said that.”
“Oh. Right, yeah. The thing is . . . uhhhh . . .”

He started digging the toe of his shoe into the floor, and when I glanced around, I saw Horse Teeth peeking at me from behind a row of lockers. (She ducked back behind them as soon as I saw her—I almost wasn’t sure it was her, but I heard the jingle bells on her shoelaces, and I heard her whispering and giggling, and then I heard Steve saying something I couldn’t hear. Then I realized that the two of them would make the worst spies ever. BTW, I think I would make an excellent spy.)

I asked Rob, “Is this about Steve?”

Rob said, “Uhhhhh . . .”

“Is this about Steve and Andrea Ogilvy?”

Rob said, “Uhhhhh . . .”

“I know they’re over there listening, OK? I’m not an idiot.”


I said, “OK.”

Rob said, “OK?”

I said, “Yeah. O! K!”

Rob said, “OK?”

I think I got a little huffy and blew air through my bangs then (but maybe I’m just being paranoid, right?). I said, “Look, if Andrea wants to dress up as Little Red Riding
Hood, then let her. I’m going as a book burner. It’s really not a big deal.” (I also wanted to say, “Let her watch him shoot fake video-game deer, too. Let her listen to country music. Let her drive around his remote control car and almost break his dad’s telescope. Let her hold his hand on the bus when it feels like everyone’s looking, for thirty seconds or sixty seconds or however long she wants to.”

**IT’S A HALLOWEEN MIRACLE (1 DAY TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)**
Friday, October 27, 5:17 p.m.

Sorry I’m just now writing this. I’ve been busy. OK, what all is there to tell? Tons!

I realized on Tuesday that a rich and famous percussionist would not put up with the Poker Players, especially when they make her drumming time so miserable.

So Tuesday night I looked up the rules of poker online. It’s not hard, really, if you just memorize the different hands, which I did. And on Wednesday in band class, while the Poker Players were sitting around the drum case, playing poker, I put down my *Glow* magazine and said, “Deal me in.” (“Deal me in!” I’m so cool! I felt like James Bond or something! Maybe it’s the stained-glass shoes I was wearing that got me in the right mood, I don’t know.)

I wish I could say that I beat them every time with a royal flush (I didn’t) or that I like poker a lot now (I don’t), but I *did* beat them at *one* hand with a pair of queens, and Cole actually told me, “Not bad, Anna,” and Liam said, “Yeah, not bad.” When it comes to the Poker Players, “Not bad, Anna,” is good enough for me. Even if they end up putting another sign on my butt in a week or two, at least they left me alone for a little while.
Wednesday was also the day when Elli asked to be my “date” for the Literary Characters Dance. She asked me since neither one of us had dates. She’s going to go as a princess. She’s going to carry a toy frog with a crown on its head—the frog prince. I’m still going as a book burner.

Then, yesterday, came the movie moment of my life! Finally! I thought it would never happen!

Mom and Dad came into my room while I was practicing, and they asked me if I had any money saved up for a drum set. I told them $113 (I’d done a few more tarot readings, but I didn’t tell them that part). They asked how much a drum set costs and I said that one on eBay costs about $250. They looked at each other and then they look at me again. They said that if I put that $113 toward buying a drum set, they’d PAY THE REST!!!

Mom made this big speech about how I’ve been working hard lately and how she doesn’t want her daughter to have to sell her own TV to buy what she wants, so she and Dad “had a talk about it” (just thought of this: that must have been the fight they had the day the TV ad came out) and decided to help me buy the drum set.

I sort of can’t believe it’s happening.

YES, I CAN BELIEVE IT (STILL 1 DAY TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Friday, October 27, 6:20 p.m.

IT IS REALLY HAPPENING! (INSERT LITTLE BABY ANGELS SINGING AND PLUCKING HARP HERE!)

MUSIC (STILL 1 DAY TILL HALLOWEEN DANCE)
Friday, October 27, 7:05 p.m.
I just called Elli with the good news, and she’s going to come over to help me look for sheet music online. (Did you know that you can get ALL KINDS of drum set sheet music—jazz and rock and tons of other stuff? Maybe I can even find some Foxboro sheet music.) She’s also going to help me make a book-burner looking thing out of our fire extinguisher (sure hope nothing catches fire between now and the dance). I’m going to color a pair of her shoes to go with her princess costume. I’m going to draw the Lovers card on one and the Star card on the other. Those are her favorite tarot cards. Then I’m going to cover the rest with gold stars. (She’s bringing over a gold paint pen from her mom’s old craft kit. Hopefully the paint’s not too gloppy after sitting in there so many months.)
Cole,

Sorry, I can’t go to the dance with you. I’m going with Elli. (Here’s a tip: don’t wait until the night before something is going on to invite someone to it.) Although, I’m glad you got to look at her costume when she got home. It DID turn out good, didn’t it? The sequined scarf was my idea, BTW. And I made the shoes.

But maybe we can all go together—the three of us. It will be more fun that way, and much less weird.

Why are you going as Sherlock Holmes now? I thought you were going to go as a marine biologist. Couldn’t you find any books with marine biologists in them?

Anna

P.S.: Thanks for the congrats on the drum set. I’m excited, too. You’ll have to help me pick out which color drum set I want. They have all different kinds.
A detective, huh? Yeah, I guess I could see you making a good detective when you
grow up—probably a better detective than a marine biologist. (You know who would be
a horrible detective? Andrea. The “O” in “Ogilvy” must stand for “Obvious.” Oh, and
Steve would be a bad detective, too. In case you haven’t read my blog lately, I’ll tell you
all about it when I see you tomorrow.) Oh yeah, what time do you and Billie want to
come over before the dance?

Anyway, like I said, I think you’d make a good detective.

Anna

From: “Anna” <littledrummergirl@kln.net>
To: “Cole” <speedofsound@kln.net>
Subject: RE: why don’t you go as a real drummer and I’ll go as a detective?
Sent: Friday, October 27, 11:13 p.m.

Cole,

Five o’clock sounds fine.

I know there are a lot of drummers in different books. But for one thing, I’m not into
couple costumes. I think they’re cheesy, even if the people wearing them aren’t a
“couple.”

For another thing, I want to be a book burner so I can make Ms. Remington mad.

For a third thing, I already made my book-burning thing with Elli and I really like it.
For a fourth thing, I already am a real drummer. Why would I want to go to a Halloween dance dressed as myself?

Anna
I can’t stop looking at drum sets!!! I’ve been sitting here trying to decide between the yellow one and the turquoise one. Or maybe the black one. It probably doesn’t matter since Cole, Elli, and I will just end up putting stickers and paint-pen designs all over it anyway after a while. But I want to get the right one . . .

Elli just asked me why I’m blogging this instead of deciding on a drum set and bidding on one finally. She and Cole are standing behind me. He’s wearing a red hat with earflaps and carrying a magnifying glass. She’s wearing the princess costume—frog, crown, my sequined scarf, the tarot shoes, etc. I sure do wish they’d stop breathing down my neck and let me make this decision already. They’re reading over my shoulder and distracting me!

Ha ha! Cole is saying, “You’re not trying to make a decision. You’re just typing.”

Billie says, “Just buy the turquoise one.”

Now Cole says, “No, the black one.”

Cole and Billie are always disagreeing with each other, just to cause trouble. TtDhs!

Hello, this is Cole. I have taken the keyboard away from Anna. I sure am glad her parents got her this wireless keyboard for her birthday.

Anna is trying to get the keyboard back now but she’s giggling too much and Billie is holding her back. Billie needs to quit giggling too or else she’s going to let go of Anna on accident. Now Billie says she wants the keyboard.
HI!!!! This is ELLI (not Billie)!!!! LOL!!! Now Cole is holding on 2 Anna & I can type wtvr I want 2!!! I can even bid on the turqoise drumset bc no one can stop me. I can click BID right now!!! Im gonna do it. Im gonnd do it. Im

OK, I’m back. I got loose of Cole and started messing up Elli’s hair under her crown, so she gave the keyboard back to me. It was Cole’s idea: “Go for the hair.” (BTW, I want to point out that it took a lot of fighting for Cole to get my keyboard away from me, even if it is wireless. I may be skinny, but I am tough, and I have sharp fingernails. Don’t I, Cole? Ha ha!)

Anyway, I think I’m going to make Cole and Billie mad by picking the yellow drum set. They’re both saying “NO,” but I don’t care, I’m going to buy it . . .

AAAAACK! I just did it! I just clicked the “bid” button. Ohmigosh. I wonder if I’ll actually win it? By the time we get back from the dance, I’ll know (the auction is up in two hours).

Cole just said, “You can bid on another one if you lose that one.” Duh, Cole! Like I don’t know how to use eBay! Ha ha! Now Cole says I won’t be laughing when he gets a hold of my keyboard again. Well, for Cole’s sake—and the sake of my fingernails—I’d better post this now. The dance starts in, like, ten minutes! I didn’t know it was that late! Why did you two let me sit here for so long? What are we waiting for?
Dear Darcy,

I am writing this e-mail to offer you some advice: the next time a girl writes you and says she wants a job, you should give her a chance, because if she’s anything like me (smart, mature, funny, etc.), she would probably be good at helping people solve their problems.

I used to want a drum set. Now someone in Phoenix is sending me one. I used to want the other percussionists in my band class to leave me alone. Now I don’t care so much what they do. I used to want a boyfriend like crazy. Now I don’t care so much about that either. Well, maybe I care a little bit. When I saw my old boyfriend Steve dancing with Andrea “Little Red Riding Hood” Ogilvy at the Literary Characters Dance last week, I felt kind of sick to my stomach for about a second. But then my friends Billie and Cole pulled me out on the dance floor, and I forgot all about it. Plus: Billie kept showing off the shoes I’d made her, and everyone thought they were awesome. Plus: Cole was dancing much closer to me than Billie was (!!!). Plus: My fire extinguisher, which was part of my book burner costume, “accidentally” went off while we were dancing, and it sprayed Little Red Riding Hood. And I didn’t even get in trouble for it because (surprise!) Ms. Remington liked my costume so much and because, like she said, “accidents happen.”

So right now my life is good. No thanks to you.
Anna
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