



**Morgan Baden**



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## ONE

“SAY HELLO TO YOUR FRIENDS!”

“Mo-om!” I rolled my eyes as I bounded up the stairs to my bedroom. Why did she always tell me to say hello to my friends when they were already waiting in MY room? I mean, they’re my FRIENDS. Of course I’m going to say hello to them. I *invited* them, right?

Anyway, I burst into my bedroom, grinning before the door was fully open. It was seven p.m. on a Monday, which meant my best girls were waiting for me: Dee and Margo Sleeplake, identical twins with long red hair, and Lola Crestwell (of *the* Stoney Valley Crestwells). It was

time for our weekly Super Sweet Unicorn Club meeting.

My smile waned when I saw the expressions on their faces.

“Kate! You’re three minutes late!” Dee snapped. She’s the saltier of the Sleeplake twins, but also the prettier and the smarter and the funnier, so she can get away with it. Margo, her little sister by just four minutes, grimaced at me from her spot next to Dee on the floor. (In retrospect, it was probably a smile, but Margo’s face can sometimes look...unfortunate.) Then there was Lola, who halfheartedly waved to me from my bed, where she was lounging and tapping her foot along to whatever song was playing through the single earbud perched in her left ear.

“Sorry,” I huffed to everyone as I slid into my desk chair. “Practice went into overtime. Everyone’s gearing up for the game this weekend!”

“What game?” Lola asked. I shot Lola a Look but it went unnoticed. Listen, I love Lola. I’ve known her since we were practically born—our mothers were college roommates—but her head is either up in the clouds...or firmly planted inside her ass.

“The Homecoming game?” I wiggled my untamed eyebrows up and down. “The biggest football day of the year? I’m the captain of the cheerleading team, remember?”

“Vaguely,” Lola said, wrinkling her delicate—and expensive—nose. “Sports are so pedestrian.”

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. *Not today, Satan*, I thought.

Once again, Lola didn’t notice my rage; she was too

busy adjusting her outfit, which was typically outrageous: a black silk blouse that drooped off one shoulder, revealing a silver lace bralette strap, and black leather pants that blended seamlessly with her over-the-knee black stiletto boots. On her head was a black felt fedora, perfectly tilted. The look was a little much, even for her, but still I knew everyone at Stoney Valley High would be wearing knock-offs the next day, like always. She was the single greatest trendsetter this town had ever seen; I'm pretty sure her monthly clothing allowance was more than my mom's annual salary. Capitalism!

"Pedestrian or not, sports are a seventy-five billion dollar industry," Dee countered. I shook my head to force myself out of my daydream, in which Lola was taking me shopping with her mother's black AmEx, and winked my thanks to Dee, who always had my back.

"I love sports," Margo offered. No one responded. Poor Margo. Always stuck in Dee's shadow. (Literally; she was two inches shorter and usually trailed behind her.)

"Homecoming is going to be so awesome this year," Dee continued. She began counting off the events on her fingers. "The parade, our epic float competition, the Homecoming Queen announcement, and the dance!"

"It's the most important week of our high school careers!" I reminded everyone, shifting importantly in my seat. "And all the seniors are counting on me to deliver excellence. I'm exhausted already! Between perfecting our new cheerleading routine and designing the float and planning the dance — I'm on the dance committee, remember? — and of course, regular senior year stuff

and Club business, I kind of can't wait for this week to be over."

"Wow, you do so much for Stoney Valley High," Margo marveled. I tried to look modest but was secretly thrilled someone noticed how full my plate was. Even if it was just Margo.

"Anyway," I rolled my eyes and looked at my Apple Watch. I gasped. "It's seven-oh-four! This meeting is officially called to order!"

A hush settled over my bedroom as we all situated ourselves. It was time to get real. But also be polite, because our customers would be calling us any minute, and we had a reputation to uphold.

Did the word "customers" trip you up? Probably! Maybe I should back up a minute and fill you in. I'm Kate Davis, and I'm the President and Founder of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club. (More about that later!) I'm seventeen and a senior at Stoney Valley High School in beautiful, progressive Stoney Valley, New Jersey. I feel really lucky to have lived here all my life. Dee and Margo do, too. They live right next door with their mom, who, as a single parent of four kids, struggles a lot. (The twins' dad died when we were all little.) Due to our shared geography, we grew really close as kids, and we had the best time hanging out. (Even if Margo had to be there, too.)

Lola, though, would probably rather live someplace more glamorous than New Jersey (even though I think it's perfect here). She and her parents, both high-powered executives who are always working, live way across town in Stoney Valley's biggest mansion, known as

Crestwell Manor, which was once featured on Architectural Digest's Instagram account. (My house doesn't have a name, but if it did, I bet it would be something like "the Davis Dude Ranch." I don't care about fashion, except for athleisure wear, and I'm pretty sporty — I'm captain of the Stoney Valley cheerleading team and I run three miles every morning — so I've been called a tomboy my whole life. Of course, I wholly reject those kinds of gender stereotypes. But still. "Davis Dude Ranch" has a nice ring to it!)

Anyway, my house might not be fancy like Lola's, but it's pretty cozy. I live with my parents and my little sister, Samantha, plus my mom's mom, NiNi, who moved in with us last year. NiNi is the best — she's a retired librarian who now spends her spare time baking lots of delicious treats and bingeing soap operas — and everyone on our block watches out for her. (She's getting pretty old.) It's safe to say people started to like *me* better once they met NiNi—so in a way, she's great for business! In the months since I'd started the Club, we'd built a consistent client base, but I was very focused on continuing to grow. I wouldn't stop until *all* of the unicorn owners in Stoney Valley called us first for their unicorn sitting needs.

Speaking of business...my friends were over because it was time for our Super Sweet Unicorn Club meeting. They were held Mondays and Wednesdays at seven in the evening, right here in my bedroom. I took the Club very seriously. You'll see why soon!

I cleared my throat and tried to stop the cheesy grin I felt spreading over the bottom half of my face. I

couldn't help but get a thrill deep inside me every time I called a meeting of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club to order. Sometimes, I got so flipping excited about everything I'd accomplished, and so proud of our successes, that I just wanted to grab my pom poms and do a herkie.

Suddenly, the phone rang from inside my desk drawer. We had a separate phone for the Club, and outside of our regular meetings, it lived in my drawer, locked up tight. I fumbled with the key and answered the phone right before it was sent to voicemail.

"Hello, Super Sweet Unicorn Club. Kate speaking. How may I help you?"

"Are you alone in the house?"

"What?" I said quickly, feeling my heartbeat quicken.

"I said, are you alone in the house?" A deep voice growled through my phone and I closed my eyes, feeling beads of sweat curl onto my forehead. Not this again!

A few weeks after I first established the Club, we were spammed with scary phone calls. At the same time, there was a Twitter rumor going around that a serial robber was on the loose in Stoney Valley. As you can imagine, trying to launch a business in that kind of climate was terrifying! Eventually, the Stoney Valley Gazette, with yours truly at the helm (that's our school paper, of which I am the editor), uncovered the truth behind the rumors and the calls, and a middle school kid was brought in for questioning. She confessed to everything; apparently she'd been trying to become Internet-famous. There were no robbers in Stoney Valley (pew!). The girl



ended up transferring schools.

The voice coming through my phone now was decidedly *not* that of a middle school girl. In fact, it sounded kind of...familiar. I sprang to my feet.

“Bradley Whittaker! I will murder you!” I shouted.

On the phone, Brad’s laughter was so intense it was nearly silent. All I could hear was raspy breathing and an occasional squeal. I imagined it would be similar to the sound I’d hear when I found time to kill him. Which I was definitely putting in capital letters on the front page of my bullet journal, and you best believe I was going to use my favorite scented pens to do it. The jerk!

“You. Will. Regret. This.” I snarled. I jammed my pointer finger from tapping it too hard on my phone in an attempt to really punctuate my seriousness, but that’s the problem with stupid phones these days — they really don’t let you make the kind of point you want to make when it comes to ending phone calls you don’t like.

After a moment of stunned silence, the Super Sweet Unicorn Club sprang into action.

“Holy cow!” Dee exclaimed. She pulled a party-size bag of tortilla chips and a jar of salsa out of her backpack and offered them to me. “Snack?”

“Are you okay?” Margo worried, patting my arm. I pushed her away as I reached for the salsa.

“Who was that?” Lola asked in her mild way, which technically could be interpreted as “disinterested,” but if you knew Lola like I do, you’d understand that she’s just very mentally busy and can’t always find the energy to express her feelings to her friends.

“Brad Whittaker is the dirtiest, most low-down, grossest, creepiest, jerkiest creature in the history of Stoney Valley!” I declared. I was so furious, a big glob of tomato fell from my chip and landed on the front of my gray hoodie.

“He’s always been like this,” Dee said knowingly, and I nodded, pleased that at least someone understood me. Brad had been in our class since kindergarten and he’d been pulling tricks on me for years, but this was the first time he’d ever come after my business. Once Homecoming was over and I had time to think, I was going to have to get him back. *Good.*

When my anger subsided I wiped off the salsa and gathered myself — a boss must always think of her team first — and realized we were in the middle of a meeting, and my emotions would need to wait. I cleared my throat and sat back down in my desk chair.

“Sorry about that. As President of the Club, it’s my responsibility to —“

*Ring, ring.*

I leapt for it, grateful not just for the impending business but also because I was really winging this little speech I was about to deliver, and I had no idea what I was about to say. “Hello, Super Sweet Unicorn Club. Kate speaking. How may I help you?”

“Oh, thank goodness you answered! I’ve been counting down until your meeting time so I could get you scheduled right away!”

I almost gasped. I recognized the voice right away. “Hi, Ms. Martin. You’re one of our most important customers. You know you can call us anytime!”

Dee kicked me and I nearly swore out loud. “No, she can’t! That’s against the rules!” she yell-whispered.

I rolled my eyes. Dee would never let me forget the one lousy time I’d taken a job from a client who had called outside of our regular meeting hours. The entire club had nearly broken up over it. I’d sworn to never take a job that way again — we all agreed it wasn’t fair of me to have first dibs just because the phone lived in my room — and since then, I’d mostly abided by the rules. I mean, I guess it’s true that I’d taken a few off-the-books jobs since then, and just conveniently failed to log them in our shared calendar. But what they don’t know can’t hurt them, right?

“When do you need us, Ms. Martin?” I cooed. She could be a little high-strung, as evidenced by the fact that she almost never hired sitters for her two unicorns. And when she did, she stayed home and kept a close eye on us. She simply didn’t trust anyone but herself.

I couldn’t blame her. Her two unicorns, Betsy and Tacy, were *legendary*. In fact, I would say that Betsy and Tacy were the most important unicorns in all of Stoney Valley. Of New Jersey, even. Of the world!

Hmm. Maybe I should explain a bit. See, unicorns are native to New Jersey, as everyone knows. And Ms. Martin has been able to trace Betsy and Tacy’s genealogy enough to confidently declare that they are descendants of the first unicorns to ever roam the lands. Can you imagine?! The Stoney Valley Historical Society even hammered a big plaque to the front of Ms. Martin’s stables to brag about it.

As a result, the town treasured Betsy and Tacy. Ms.

Martin was very protective of them – we all were. They were celebrities.

Anyway, Margo passed me the Club planner as Ms. Martin went on. “I have a very special event,” she explained, as I flipped through the calendar. “Kate, I’ll need your best person to take care of the girls.”

“Of course,” I murmured. My heart was racing. Did this mean what I think it meant? Was Ms. Martin actually going to let the Club be in charge of Betsy and Tacy, and prove our worth?

“And I know it’s short notice, but I’m accepting an award in the city, so I have no choice but to do this,” Ms. Martin added.

I bit my lip. It was all happening: we were going to get to sit for the most celebrated unicorns in the world. Dollar signs danced before my eyes. My mind began racing, mapping out new advertisements for the Club that touted how much our clients trusted us. We’d be famous!

“You know you can count on the Club,” I said confidently to Ms. Martin. “Just tell me when you need us, and we’ll be there!”

“This Saturday,” she replied.

I froze.

We hadn’t been booking any clients for Saturday because of Homecoming. The parade was in the morning, the game was in the afternoon, and the dance was that night — and of course, everyone in the Club was planning on attending. Half of us even had dates! (Not me, though. The boys in our grade are disgusting. See: Brad Whittaker!)

My eyes landed on the calendar listing for Saturday. Sure enough, someone—probably Margo—had doodled all over the entry for that day, tiny sketches of things like footballs and leaves and crowns. There were even sparkly pink heart stickers. God, she’s so tragic.

We never liked to keep our clients waiting, so I told Ms. Martin that we’d figure it out and text her with the name of her sitter in a few minutes. Then I hung up, panic rising up my throat. “You guys. What are we going to do? She needs a sitter for Saturday!”

“Not it,” Lola called. She was bent over, painting her green fingernail acrylics with a shiny topcoat. The stink of it filled the room.

Dee opened up my window to get some fresh air. “Kate, we’re all going to Homecoming. You know that. You’ll just have to tell her to find someone else.”

I gasped. “Absolutely not. This is Betsy and Tacy we’re talking about!”

“But it’s *Homecoming*,” Dee stressed.

“Clearly, Ms. Martin doesn’t know that!” I snapped. I leaped up and began pacing around my bedroom, wringing my hands. “This job would be such a big get for the Club! It would lead to so much publicity!”

“I could get my parents to sponsor us for some more advertising,” Lola said casually, waving her nails around. “Maybe we could even hire a photographer to capture some content, and really show off how much Ms. Martin trusts us.”

I groaned. “That is *such* a good idea!”

“Kate,” Dee said patiently. “We can’t take the gig.”

I stamped my foot. “We *have* to take the gig! This

could be life-changing for the Club!”

And the success of the Club meant *everything* to me. Why couldn't my best friend see that? What was wrong with her? Had Margo gotten into her head?

I glanced at Margo and felt myself sneer. No way. Dee knew better than to be influenced by her twin.

“But you're super busy all day and night on Saturday,” Dee pointed out.

“We all are,” Lola nodded.

I wanted to scream. Five minutes ago, Lola hadn't even realized what Homecoming was. The audacity!

“We're running out of time,” I nearly sobbed. “Ms. Martin is expecting a call back! What do we do?”

I was spinning. I was losing it. I was—

“I'll go,” Margo offered.

The room stilled. Time stopped. My heart sank, slowly drowning in a pool of dread.

“You?” I whispered. “But...”

“Don't you have a date for the dance?” Dee asked suspiciously. “What's his name. Jake? Jack? Jasper?”

“Hunter,” Margo corrected her. “My boyfriend of three years.” Then she shrugged. “But I don't care. This is more important. I can cancel on him, or just be late, or whatever.”

I stared at Margo, crestfallen. Margo was a founding member of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club, sure. But...how could I put this delicately?

Margo was a bad person. Not just bad; awful. And an even worse unicorn sitter. We only kept her in the club because it would be too much drama to kick her out. Over the years we'd managed to minimize her par-

icipation in it until it was so tiny, so barely noticeable, that she didn't even realize that we often called emergency meetings without her. She hadn't been assigned a sitting job in months.

I felt myself start to tear up as I realized what I was going to have to do.

"No, it's okay," I said, the lie landing on my bones and settling in for a good long while. "The Club was my idea, and I'm the one who can't say no to Ms. Martin. You go to Homecoming, Margo. I'll handle Betsy and Tacy that day."

An audible hush fell over the room as we all realized what was happening; a required sacrifice that only the President of the most responsible, respectable unicorn sitting club in all of Stoney Valley could perform.

I, Kate Davis — head cheerleader, class valedictorian, class president, and chair of the dance committee — was going to skip Homecoming.



## TWO

I'M PROUD TO SAY THE Super Sweet Unicorn Club was all my idea.

It all started in the middle of junior year. I had just come home from choir practice when my mom called to tell me she'd be late, and could I please start dinner, finish the laundry, check in on my grandmother (NiNi lives with us in an attached mother-in-law suite), ask my younger sister, Samantha, if she could help me with my homework—she's a certified genius and even takes classes at the local college!—and, most importantly, feed and bathe the unicorns.



My head started spinning at the list of her demands. But mostly I thought, *those damn unicorns*. See, everyone in our town of Stoney Valley had pet unicorns. We're known as the unicorn capital of the world, with fourteen spectacular unicorn stables just within the town limits! And even though unicorns are beautiful and special and everyone loved them, people also always complained about them—how you had to feed them, and groom them, and make sure they got enough exercise. Unicorns aren't easy like horses or guinea pigs. The care and feeding of magical creatures is hard and time-consuming.

But most of all, it was a total pain trying to find someone to take care of your unicorn when you were out of town. I had personal experience with this: last year, when our choral group—of which I'm the star soloist—went to England for the international choral competition, the trip coincided with my parents' own anniversary trip. So *they* were out of town, and *I* was out of town, and poor old NiNi was way too frail to take care of her own unicorn, let alone those of the entire Davis family. (And I think we all just forgot about Samantha, which happens sometimes. She's very capable, which means everyone assumes she's handling her own stuff. Somewhere.)

Anyway, we spent the weeks leading up to our trips looking for someone to come sit for our unicorns. Everyone we asked was fine with taking on one uni for a day or two, but no one wanted *three* for an entire week. My parents ended up postponing their anniversary trip, because at the end of the day, my choral group trip was so much more important.

After that disaster, I couldn't stop thinking of the predicament my family had allowed ourselves to get into. We Davises were supposed to be practical, forward-thinking, reliable; we had a reputation to uphold! In addition, I'd been a little panicky about whether my college applications were going to show enough initiative, especially when we only came in second place in the international choral competition (what college was going to be impressed with that?!). Did I have enough extracurriculars? Were extracurriculars still important, or did schools only look at your social media influencer score? No one, not even my guidance counselor, could give me a clear answer.

The stress was keeping me up at night.

And that day, the idea just arrived in my head, fully formed: The Super Sweet Unicorn Club. I immediately got to work fleshing out a business plan.

I knew nothing could stop me. But I also knew I couldn't do it alone. So the next morning, I raced to school. In between gym, where gross Alex Black tried to stick a half-eaten peanut butter sandwich down my shirt (ahem, the front of it; he's such a pervert), and math class, where Dee started loudly crying because she flunked a pop quiz (again), I organized my thoughts. By the time I met my friends at lunch, I had it all planned out.

Lunch that day was the "April surprise" (surprise! We still don't know what it was supposed to be!). Margo kept trying to talk about how gross it was, but I cut her off and airdropped each of them the seven-page document I'd written during biology.

“I’ve had the greatest idea,” I announced. Margo looked kind of gray as she picked up her fork (she has a sensitive stomach) but Dee perked right up in between bites. Even Lola looked kind of intrigued, which for her is a solid green light to continue, so I did.

“Remember that time a few weeks ago, when I had a list of chores to do a mile long?” I started.

“What are chores?” Lola wrinkled her nose. I wanted to punch her in the throat, but she’s my oldest friend. Dee, sensing the tension, whispered in Lola’s ear. I waited in impatient silence while Lola’s face registered surprise, understanding, and finally, pity. Oh, like her life is so flipping wonderful just because she doesn’t have to help out around her mansion? Sometimes Lola forgets I know all her secrets.

I finally continued. “So anyway, when mom asked me to take care of the unicorns, I thought, how great would it be to just hire someone to handle them on days like this? And then I thought, but wait, what if we did know of someone to hire, but that person was busy when we needed them?” I think about things like that. I’ve been told I’m really deep, which I think is true.

“Go on,” Dee prompted. She shoveled a forkful of surprise into her mouth. Next to her, Margo paled even more. Her eyes were glassy.

“So then I thought, well, what if there was, like, a club? Where someone could call and get a bunch of people all at once, thereby increasing the odds that someone would be free on the day you needed them?”

Lola put down her vegan, gluten-free wrap and slapped her manicured hand down on the table. “Ge-

nius!”

The bitch was making fun of me, but I ignored her. This was way too groundbreaking an idea to waste time trading barbs with my best friend.

“And then I remembered reading a book when I was a kid about a similar thing. Like, where all these friends created a business kind of like this one? But I couldn’t think of the name.” I shrugged.

Dee raised her eyebrows. “Sleepover Friends? I loved those books.”

I shook my head.

The gray thing at the end of the table moved. “The Taffy Sinclair books?”

Margo! I’d forgotten all about her. “No, that wasn’t it either.”

“I don’t read much, sorry I can’t help,” Lola said coolly. I was pretty sure Lola’s eyes were only trained to read emojis, so I wasn’t surprised.

We all paused for a moment. The hum of the Stoney Valley High School cafeteria settled into me. Our regular table was right in the middle of the caf because we all liked to see and be seen—or at least Lola did, and her parents had paid some kind of endowment to the school which, in return, had reserved a table with her name on it for the four (or five, or indefinite) years of her high school career. The jocks were next to us, and next to them were the cheerleaders and the student council kids. On the other side of us were the theater nerds and then the computer geeks, and behind them were the social media influencers. Technically I should’ve been sitting with them (I’d been featured on the Stoney Valley

Gazette's Instagram feed more than any other student) but that would mean I would also sit with the cheerleaders, and the newspaper staff (I'm the editor), and the theater kids (see the aforementioned brag about being the lead soloist in the Stoney Valley choral group).

Sigh. Sometimes, it was really tough being me. I wondered if Lola, Dee, and Margo were thinking the same thing about themselves in that very moment.

"Oh well," I said, finally admitting defeat. I'd never remember the name of the books I was thinking about, but it didn't matter. What *did* matter was that I'd had a super sweet idea, and it was time to get things rolling. In fact, that's even what I'd decided in that very moment to call the business: the Super Sweet Unicorn Club.

I quickly explained everything before the lunch bell rang. After a lot of discussion, which was mostly me discussing and my friends listening, we decided I would be President of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club (because obviously). Lola would be the Vice President, because she had generously offered to have her parents pay to set up a website, hire graphic designers for a logo, incur any advertising costs, and generally just be our financial sponsors.

I've mentioned Lola's house, Crestwell Manor, but I think it's also important to explain Lola herself. See, Lola is the extremely spoiled only child of Samantha Wells and Aaron Crest, two very successful tech gurus who launched countless startups in Silicon Valley before deciding to have a child and settle down here in Stoney Valley. Why here? Well, Samantha went to college with my mother. In fact, they were roommates! As a result,

Lola and I grew up together...well, as “together” as we could, considering Lola had full-time nannies and would travel the world with her parents, while I mostly had NiNi to watch me once my mom went back to work. And the furthest vacation we’ve ever taken is to Bay Haven for our annual summer family reunion.

Lola has all the money she could ever want, but what’s cool is what she does with it. Sure, she buys fancy cars and always has the latest gadgets and clothes. But she’s also incredibly generous when it comes to the causes that are important to her, like the environment (all her cars are hybrids), animals (she petitioned the school to serve meatless meet on Taco Tuesday!), and her friends (see above re: funding the Club). She has gorgeous natural curly black hair, and perfectly smooth dark brown skin—once, she asked me why I had painted pink blotches all over my face, and I had to explain the concept of chin acne to her—and a perfect size four figure. Underneath the ditziness that stems from her elitist home life, she’s actually quite smart. And she loves unicorns, maybe even more than the rest of us in the Club. I think it has something to do with her being an only child of two very busy parents, but I’m not an expert. (I mean, I think I am, but I don’t have the credentials to prove it yet.)

Back to the Club: we all voted Dee for Secretary because the rest of us had atrophied our handwriting by texting and typing too much (plus, she dotted all her I’s with hearts). Dee was happy to take that role, as she loved writing and reading and wanted to be a famous food blogger (who had the heart to tell her blogging was

dead? Not me!). Dee and Margo were Stoney Valley locals, too; their mom, who insisted we call her Stevie, had been a teacher when we were kids but had worked her way through the ranks of education administration and was now the principal of Stoney Valley High School. This fact mortified Dee most days, especially when Margo and her gross boyfriend decided to lock lips in the hallways, because what if their mom thought it was *Dee* doing that? (Have you no shame, Margo?)

The other thing that mortified Dee? Stevie's dating life. A few years ago, their mom had started dating the new art teacher in town. (It wasn't a conflict of interest, the school board ultimately decided, because Stevie only oversaw the high school, and Mr. Tapman taught at the elementary school.) Mr. Tapman (who definitely did not want us calling him Gabe, which was his name) seemed like a nice enough guy, but Dee and Margo, and their younger brothers Aiden and Bryon, still gave their mom a hard time about it. They did things like play pranks on Mr. Tapman and try to set Stevie up with other men. If you asked me, they were all being a little childish. Stevie deserved love!

Dee and Margo had freckled skin (Dee hated it) and red hair (Dee hated it) and were short and muscular. After a childhood filled with intense gymnastics competitions, neither of them played sports now, and Margo appeared to actively hate anything athletic. Other than math class, Dee got decent grades, always provided snacks, and was a really great friend. I was lucky to have her in my corner.

Where was I? Oh, right — assigning positions to

Club members. After Dee agreed to be Secretary, I offered Margo the Treasurer role, because she was the only one left. She took it. And...I mean, what else can I say? Margo is around because she comes with the package. She's also the only one of us who has a boyfriend, which is wild, considering she's the least cool of us all. And I think that's all there is to know about Margo.

After we were all assigned our roles, I decided I'd write an editorial in the Stoney Valley Gazette about the problems this town had regarding finding responsible unicorn sitting services, which could help lay the groundwork for our advertising. (I'd heard adults still read newspapers?) Then, using the books none of us could remember as inspiration, we decided to hold our club meetings twice a week and clients could only call us then to request their sitters, in order to be fair to everyone's schedules. Plus, Dee would serve snacks at every meeting to help inspire creativity and to prevent us from falling asleep from boredom. (Dee made me write that in the club charter.)

Finally, we all agreed that every meeting would be held at my house, in my room, so that we'd be near NiNi. She was just "good vibes," Dee once said, so we'd written that into the club charter, too. Everyone loved NiNi more than their own families, practically, except for Lola, who as we all know loves nothing and no one but herself.

Anyway, by the time lunch was over, it was all set. The Super Sweet Unicorn Club was officially ready to launch.

And Stoney Valley would never be the same!





## THREE

Margo

Hi guys. I'm writing in the journal even though I didn't have a sitting job. It's just been a while, you know? I get that you all have regular clients who specifically request your services, so you get most of the sitting jobs, but I still like to be included. So I guess I'll just share a little about my day? I just really miss this thing!

Well, I was at the Double Bee with Hunter...he's

**my boyfriend. (I know you guys forget about him a lot. He's the really cute guy I'm always with—when I'm not with you, of course!) Anyway...**

RIGHT AFTER MONDAY'S MEETING WHERE I graciously decided to sacrifice my own fun and popularity for our clients, Margo and her boyfriend, Hunter, went to the Double Bee for burgers and fries. The Double Bee was the coolest hangout in Stoney Valley. (Lola hated it, because they didn't use local, grass-fed beef for their burgers and had very few vegan options.). When we were kids, sometimes our parents would take me and Samantha and even NiNi there for dinner on special occasions — birthdays and graduations and that time Samantha won the national spelling bee. Did I mention Samantha is a certified genius?

Now that we're older and we hang out at the Double by ourselves, it felt like we'd been inducted into some kind of exclusive society. Whenever we walked through the front doors, with a band playing on the stage across from the old-fashioned soda bar and a packed dance floor where everyone grinded on each other while eating fries...well, it sure made you feel like being a teenager was everything the world promised you it would be.

But I digress. So Margo and Hunter were there. Now, I should fill you in what I know about Margo and Hunter...or at least, what I think I know, since I try not to pay too much attention. Margo apparently started dating Hunter, like, before the rest of us even started menstruating (which, if you weren't aware, is pro-

nounced *men-stroo-ating*). Hunter wasn't horrible looking, I guess. I wouldn't know; I don't really look at boys much. He has this dark brown hair that sort of swooped over his forehead. His eyes were a warm brown and he seemed to smile a lot, like in a nice, welcoming way, not in a dumb way. He was just the right amount of tall and he played football, which is how I kind of know him, since I'm head cheerleader. I mean, he doesn't say hi to me in the halls or anything. I'm just saying, I've shared buses with the guy, is all.

Is it a little weird that Margo, the dullest of all of us in the Club, is the only one to have ever had a long-term boyfriend, and the only one of us who's ever kissed a boy? Or...maybe even more? Dee swore she was waiting for True Love, Lola didn't seem to have any interest in romance at all – that would require she be curious about someone beside herself – and I certainly didn't have much experience to talk of. (Boys still made me want to hurl.)

Yes. Yes, it is a little weird. But the world works in mysterious ways, though if I were to say that in front of Samantha I'd get a thirty-minute lecture on how the world actually isn't mysterious at all, it's perfectly scientific, it's just that scientists haven't figured out all the science behind the mystery, so it feels more mysterious than it actually is, and yadda yadda yadda and so on.

Margo's journal entry, as she noted, had absolutely nothing to do with our business so I was a little annoyed that she took up valuable pages on non-Club content, but I read it anyway. (What can I say? I was all caught up on my Instagram feed.) So she and her supposed

boyfriend were tucked in a booth in the back — kind of a prime spot, if you ask anyone. How did she manage to swing that?! Those booths were unofficially reserved for cool kids.

Anyway, they were in the booth...

“This burger is awesome,” Hunter said. Margo nodded, her mouth too full to respond. She too was eating a burger and they were sharing a plate of cheese fries and had a single milkshake — vanilla — between them, with two straws. *Vomit.*

“Hey, do you know what next week is?” Hunter asked suddenly.

Margo thought for a minute, trying to visualize her calendar. Her poetry assignment was due next week (Margo is in some special writer’s club at Stoney Valley High), her grandparents were coming for dinner on Tuesday, and she’d convinced Dee to let her tag along on a sitting job on Thursday. She frowned, considering. None of that seemed to be anything Hunter would care about.

In the silence, Hunter moved his hand out of the basket of fries and across the table to Margo’s, which he caressed, lovingly and greedily. He raised his eyebrows in expectation.

“It’s our three-and-a-half-year anniversary!” he exclaimed.

Margo felt her heart drop. Not *this* again.

But she painted a smile on her face. It was true; her three-and-a-half-year anniversary with Hunter was next week. Wednesday, to be exact. And that, Margo knew, meant that it was time for another conversation about

sex.

Being a 16-year-old guy (Hunter was five months younger than Margo, which was totally evident if you watched them together for even a minute), sex was all Hunter thought about. And, every time he and Margo marked an anniversary, it was all he *talked* about, too. About a week before each annual or half-year milestone, Hunter would start dropping hints about how important Margo was to him, how special. He'd tell her how he couldn't live without her and how it was so hard to not express physically what he was feeling emotionally. He'd give her meaningful glances every time they saw another couple kissing or hugging at school (as though they weren't already glued to each other's mouths all the time) and he always, always, always would "drop" a condom somewhere in Margo's vicinity—the seat of her car when she was driving him around, the floor outside of her locker when he was waiting for her to get her books, even once in the booth of a restaurant when he was opening his wallet to pay the bill.

Margo tried to be good natured about it all. It's not that she didn't want to go all the way with Hunter. She loved him! She'd been with him practically forever, and she was capital-R Ready. Sometimes, when they were on his bed rolling around, doing everything *but*, she'd start to forget why she couldn't do it. Her reasons would get all hazy and small. But then she'd catch a glimpse of herself in his dresser mirror, and she would remember.

See, there was one thing holding Margo back from taking the next, the biggest, step with Hunter. Just one tiny thing.

Okay, one kind-of-big thing.

A Margo-and-Dee-shaped thing.

And that thing was walking toward her in the Double Bee right at the very moment Hunter was about to launch into his latest diatribe about getting some action.

“Dee!” Margo ripped her hand from Hunter’s and thrust it into the air, waving. The crowds at the Double Bee were growing thicker by the second. “Over here!”

An identical version of Margo approached them. Even though she lived with her and saw her for hours every day, Margo still marveled at how much she and Dee looked alike. They both had thick, wavy red hair that hung halfway down their backs and matching green eyes that sparkled. They were both naturally athletic and still had visibly tight abs from their days as junior gymnasts. And though Dee hated it, they still mostly dressed alike; every morning, Margo would wait patiently for her sister to pick out her own clothes, and then Margo would scour her closet to find something that matched it. (Dee had long ago stopped letting Margo purchase the exact same items, but there were ways around that.) Whenever they met new people, they had to endure minutes and minutes of exclamations about how identical they were.

But there were differences that were easy to spot if you knew them well. Margo’s eyes were a little bit on the bluer side, and Dee’s skin had a few more freckles. Dee was taller by two inches, but that was just because Margo had scoliosis. And of course, their personalities were way different. As in, Dee actually *had* one, and Margo did not.

Was that mean? Sorry, not sorry.

The girls were four minutes apart but, as far as Margo knew, lightyears away when it came to experience with boys. In fact, as Margo thought about it, waiting for Dee to cut through the crowds at the Double Bee, was it possible Dee hadn't even *kissed* a boy yet? (Or a girl? Margo had tried starting conversations about being an ally, but Dee always rolled her eyes and stomped away.) (Ugh, all this s-e-x talk is so gross.) Anyway, it was something Margo knew deep in her gut: that she couldn't take this next step with Hunter, because it would mean she'd be leaving Dee behind.

And Margo would never, *ever* leave Dee behind.

Dee finally made it to their booth and slid in next to Hunter, facing Margo. Her forehead was misty with sweat.

"Man! It's so packed in here." She wiped her brow and then stole a fry from the basket. Hunter rolled his eyes.

"What have you been up to? What's going on? Tell me everything!" Margo eagerly exclaimed. She missed Dee. It had been nearly two hours since they'd seen each other.

"I had that quick job at the Delaneys," Dee said in between bites of Margo's leftover burger. Margo's heart dropped.

"I didn't know you had a sitting job," she said quietly. Suddenly the milkshake and the fries and the burger were on their way back up. She swallowed and swallowed and tried to focus her thoughts on something else, anything else. How could Dee do this to her?

“It was a last-minute gig,” Dee said breezily. “I could’ve sworn I told you this morning.”

“No,” Margo shook her head hotly. She had moved into the anger stage of the grieving process. “You definitely did not.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter, because we had plans anyway, right, Margo?” Hunter said pointedly but genially, like he knew Margo was about to have a Level 5 meltdown and was used to defusing these kinds of things. “Remember, we made a date to go pick out my birthday present and then have dinner here at the Double Bee?”

Margo rage-breathed while she stared blankly at the stranger across the table from her. It took a full minute for her to catch her breath, for his features to fall into place so she could recognize him again. Hunter. It was her boyfriend, Hunter.

Sometimes, when Margo felt like Dee had forgotten about her, she lost all sense of control, all sense of normalcy. It was good to keep Hunter around, she had long ago realized. If not for all the sex they were almost having, then for all the times he helped keep her grounded when Dee stabbed her half of their twin heart into a million pieces.

Margo cleared her throat and her vision. These episodes were blips, and she was herself again. She made a silent vow to give Hunter some extra special action the next time they had a minute to themselves to make up for this.

“You know we always sit together,” Margo carefully told Dee, remembering the guidelines from the therapist her parents had insisted she find: Communicate clearly,



calmly, and without emotion. State the facts. She'd been seeing her counselor for a few months, and she was optimistic about her progress. "It hurts me when you take jobs without telling me."

Dee shrugged. "Margo, we don't always have to do everything together. We're almost eighteen years old."

Margo's eyes widened. Never, in her whole life, had she wanted to do anything without Dee. Her therapist would definitely be hearing about this conversation.

"Plus," Dee continued casually, dipping another fry into the remains of the milkshake, "you're not exactly the best unicorn sitter, and the Delaneys have really high standards."

Margo bristled, but even she knew she couldn't argue with that. She was a terrible unicorn sitter. In fact, she hated unicorns. Like, despised them with all her being! She didn't get people's fascination with them — they were just malformed horses! — and if it weren't for Dee, she wouldn't be in the Super Sweet Unicorn Club at all.

But Dee had been obsessed with unicorns since they were kids. She loved taking care of them and had a special gift for calming them down and keeping them happy. So Margo kept her anti-unicorn feelings to herself, and held her nose every time she had to be near one. It would be off-brand for one Sleeplake twin to do something without the other, so it was just one of the many sacrifices Margo had to make in the name of twin harmony.

Sleeping with Hunter was the other one.

"Well, I just wish you would have asked me to come

with you,” Margo finally said. Her counselor had told her time and again to brush aside the little things, the micro-twingressions, in order to keep Dee in her life. (Just from reading Margo’s diaries, I have to concur she seemed like a really great counselor.) “But you’re just being the Dee I know and love. I forgive you.”

Dee shrugged, unconcerned as she finished off the fries. Hunter, though, looked exasperated.

But then, as Dee leaned across him to grab a napkin from the dispenser, Hunter’s expression changed. He looked...giddy. Margo followed his gaze.

Dee’s v-neck shirt had dipped low as she leaned over, revealing a sliver of pink bra and some significant curves that immediately had Margo wondering if Dee had stolen some bust genetics from her in the womb. And Hunter, her boyfriend of three years who’d just been about to ask her if she was finally ready to sleep with him, was positively *staring*.

Margo straightened her spine, bristling, and felt something tighten inside her. She narrowed her eyes.

She could forgive Dee for a lot of things; it was her job as her twin sister.

But she couldn’t forgive Hunter.



## FOUR

*Lola*

What's up. Kate is making me write in this thing. I asked her if I could Instagram Story it, sort of like a live journal reading, because writing out full sentences takes SO MUCH TIME and I mostly communicate in emojis now. But she said no.

*She'll see, one day soon.*

I sat for Jackie, this gorgeous blond on Tuesday after school. (Sidebar: should I pull a Beyonce and go blonde?) He's my absolute favorite charge, even though Kate is always saying we shouldn't have favorite charges. He's rowdy but also gentle and sweet, and never complains about all the weird stuff I make him do.

Daddy drove me to Jackie's owner's house since my vintage Mustang is in the shop. On the way there, we finalized our business plan for the top-secret app I've been developing. We're getting ready to beta test it soon. It just needs a few small tweaks, which is the main reason why I was so excited about this job...

AN APP?

Oh.

Well.

I guess Lola's been keeping secrets even from me. Her *best friend*.

Anyway, Lola was understating things to say Jackie was "rowdy."

Jackie was one of the oldest and also the biggest unicorns in town. He was a total sweetheart, sure, but he was one of those guys who didn't realize his own strength. It's like Jackie thought he was a tiny little kitten rather than a massive, 400-pound beast with a horn

the size of my femur.

Lola was, as she told me later, “totally preoccupied” by the business plan she was working on *and* by the texts I kept sending her about the Homecoming dance. (Even though I couldn’t go to the dance and was totally gutted about it, I was still on the dance planning committee, and I had responsibilities to uphold.) And being distracted is just about the last thing you want to be when you have to deal with a unicorn. They can totally sense our energies and emotions, and if you don’t pay complete attention to them, they figure it out pretty quickly...and you pay the price.

So Lola arrived and things were kind of hectic because the Griffin-Seewalds were rushing out the door.

“Jackie’s out back in his stable,” Ms. Griffin said as she grabbed her purse and keys from the kitchen counter. She was glamorous in that mid-thirties-working-woman kind of way, all spunky earrings and expensive yoga pants. Stoney Valley was within a reasonable commute to the big city, so many of our clients worked there. (The Club spent one Saturday a semester lobbying our local politicians to cut funding for local transit improvements. While it may sound heartless, it made good business sense: the more inconsistent the trains, the more our customers depended on us!)

“He had a late dinner,” Mr. Seewald added. His back was to Lola while he finished typing something up on his laptop. Lola peered over his shoulder. He did something with graphic design, she vaguely remembered. *Yawn.*

“Right, so no treats tonight,” Ms. Seewald said. She

fixed Lola with a stare. “Seriously, Lola. No treats for him. Got it?”

Lola nodded, her thoughts drifting to the bag of homemade trail mix stashed in her vegan leather designer backpack. Lola spent a lot of time and mental energy curating her organic, sustainable, locally-sourced, vegan diet, and brought her own food wherever she went. Well, trail mix wasn’t technically a treat, right? It was health food. She’d give it to him, she decided. Jackie could use an organic boost, and the Super Sweet Unicorn Club always knew what was best for their charges, even if it contradicted any silly rules the unicorns’ owners dictated.

When the Griffin-Seewalds left, Lola pulled out her iPad and fiddled around with her business plan for a while, all while continuing to field my texts, before deciding to go check on Jackie. The Griffin-Seewalds were DINKs (double income, no kids) and had one of the best stables in Stoney Valley. (Of course, it was nothing compared to the stables at Crestwell Manor; but then again, nothing in town could really compare to Crestwell Manor.) It was large enough for multiple unicorns, even though Jackie was their lone uni, and it was elegantly decorated, with sharp white trim, modern furniture for the sitters to lounge on, and even a flat-screen mounted to the back wall—presumably to keep Jackie company, but mostly used by the sitters. On Lola’s short walk through the flawlessly landscaped backyard, she could see Jackie’s horn softly glowing the emerging moonlight.

“Hey, buddy,” she whispered as she approached him.

It was funny, Lola had to admit—she was popular and beautiful and rich and wore the best clothes and had the most Instagram followers of anyone in Stoney Valley High, but she was much more suited to hanging out with unicorns than with other people. Maybe it was their mystical aura; maybe it was their royal kind of magic. Whatever it was, Lola connected with them on a much deeper level than she'd ever connected with a person.

Hence, the app.

Lola's app, as we would all soon learn, was called UniCon, and it was a multi-player game where users created and groomed custom unicorn characters, making in-app purchases of things like horn jewelry, clothing, accessories, and stable furniture, and then tried to outmaneuver other users' unicorns through clever trickery and manipulation. Once your unicorn had "conned" her way into the top spot on the leaderboard (by accumulating points for things like stealing other unicorns' food, trashing their stables, or tricking them into giving you their purchased items), you scored increasingly rare animated unicorn emojis that you could then use elsewhere on the web. The goal, as Lola would later announce during her TED Talk, was to make sure the world understood how special the unicorn species was.

Lola's one of my best friends and I knew she was super smart. I just...I couldn't believe she was *this* smart, you know?

Anyway, Jackie stomped his front hoof in response to Lola's soft petting and then nuzzled her long, glossy hair.

“Such a good boy,” she murmured. I swear, Lola — the prettiest and most important girl in the entire twelfth grade; the girl who, with her looks, money, and status could have any guy (or girl!) she wanted — only had eyes for our charges. (People at school were beginning to wonder about it, actually.)

Because half of Lola’s mind was still focused on the UniCon business plan, though, she didn’t notice the antsy behaviors Jackie was suddenly displaying. She brushed his shiny fur as she pondered whether her UniCon marketing strategy had a big enough budget to really make a splash. Later, she would admit that maybe he *was* swishing his tail in circles; maybe that funny noise she was hearing was actually the sound he made whenever he was nervous. (This is why I enforce the Club diary, by the way. So we can make note of the particular traits each of our clients has. It makes us better sitters!)

So when Jackie’s front left hoof thwacked against Lola’s leanly muscled thigh, she jumped in surprise. Her jump made Jackie recoil, and with a big SMACK, his tail whipped into the flat-screen TV.

Which promptly shattered.

“Omigod!” Lola covered her head and dropped to all fours the way she’d been taught in the “how to survive a terrorist attack” classes her parents made her take. Jackie, meanwhile, was suddenly calm, as though the shattering had been his intention all along, and now things were going exactly according to plan.

Lola panted for a few moments, still on the ground, before tentatively peeking through her fingers. Jackie



stared back at her.

“You okay, pretty boy?” she cooed, hopping back up to standing. Jackie responded with a flick of his tail and a nod of his horn. “You’re such a klutz!”

She examined the mess — shards of glass were everywhere — and immediately texted her housekeeper, Ava, to come clean it up. Ava was always on call and Lola knew she would arrive as soon as she could, but in the meantime, Lola had to get Jackie out of the stable — and carefully. She tapped her foot, thinking. Getting unicorns to move was always a struggle. Then she remembered: the trail mix!

Using her designer-sneaker-clad foot, Lola carefully kicked some of the bigger shards out of the way and then sprinkled trail mix in strategic spots on the ground, leading back into the backyard. Jackie quickly followed her, lapping up the crumbs. Lola recorded a few seconds of her genius plan. *See?* She wanted to gloat to the Griffin-Seewalds. *The Club always knows what’s best.*

Once outside, Lola gasped. It was magic hour, the time of evening when the light was soft and glowy and perfect for photo shoots. Her eyes lit up. She needed to finalize some artwork for the app, and beautiful Jackie would make an ideal unicorn model. While he happily finished eating Lola’s forbidden trail mix, she dashed inside for her Uni-Kit.

Uni-Kits, I’m proud to say, were all my idea. In an effort to be the best unicorn sitters in Stoney Valley, I developed the idea for them after a sitting job for a unicorn that had almost no toys to occupy her time. I’d wasted half the gig looking for something for her to play

with and the other half inventing the Uni-Kit. They're special boxes filled with essentials to make our unicorn sitting jobs fun and educational for everyone. We make sure the boxes themselves are decorated in bright colors to appeal to unicorns, so they know the kits are as special as they are, while the insides are filled with stimulating activities and treats. When I explained the idea to the rest of the Club, I stressed the customization aspect: each member was encouraged to put whatever they wanted in their kits, as long as safety was a priority. Lola's was filled with dress-up items like hats, sunglasses, and necklaces — whatever would help her create the best Snaps, Stories, and posts, above all else. (Mine, on the other hand, was usually filled with unicorn enrichment materials, like gentle exercises, words of encouragement, and passages from classic novels featuring unicorns that I often read aloud.)

Back in the magic hour-filled backyard, Lola rifled through her Uni-Kit until she found what she was looking for: a glittery, sparkling crown.

"Come here, King Jackie!" she trilled, waving the crown around. Jackie ignored her, licking up the last of the seeds, but still she approached him, gently placing the crown over his horn and settling it right in between his ears. She stepped back to study him. Her face flooded with awe.

"You look perfect!" She clapped her hands and then grabbed the professional-grade camera that her dad had bought for her just for this purpose. She had to capture these photos before the light changed...and before Jackie realized he was wearing a crown.

She shot photo after photo of him from different angles all over the backyard. He really did look like royalty, she admired through her lens, snapping away. Maybe she should bring a cape and a scepter next time.

Her phone buzzed just as she had turned the camera on herself (obviously, she needed to document her outfit of the day: an elegantly draped maxi skirt, a plain white cropped tee, and thin vegan leather sandals handcrafted by women in Nigeria, part of a charity she'd made her parents support). She snapped, filtered, and posted a single selfie before checking her texts. It was Lola's *other* best friend, Ella Sankaran, who was almost as rich and pretty as Lola, and as a result admired and resented her in equal measures.

*Rumor has it we're running neck-and-neck for Homecoming Court, Ella's text read. GL!*

Lola rolled her eyes. As if!

Stoney Valley High's Homecoming was a pretty big deal, which resulted in a long, drawn-out process that kept us students occupied for weeks. First, about a month before the big day, we all voted for ten students (male, female, or non-identifying) from each grade to be named to the Homecoming Court. From there, they campaigned for their votes by hanging posters, passing out buttons, and, in Lola's case, running a paid social media campaign with niche targeting to reach all the kids she normally ignored at school. In the week leading up to Homecoming itself, everyone had to log their votes via an old-fashioned paper ballot system run by the Student Council (that's me!). Final votes were due by lunchtime on Friday, and then my fellow Council mem-

bers and I would turn in the ballots to the Vice Principal for counting. At halftime on Saturday's big game, two winners per grade would be announced, and then at that night's dance, they'll be celebrated with a crowning ceremony. (Winners were able to self-select which title they preferred, King or Queen. Lola had won the past three years in a row, and had always chosen King, much to the chagrin of Jameson Eckerts, who had also chosen King.)

Surprising absolutely no one who followed Stoney Valley High politics, Lola and Ella were both on this year's Court. But, like every year, we all knew Lola would win, so Ella's text left her looking a little desperate. Lola responded to it with a gif from the movie "Carrie," where a bucket of pig's blood is dumped on top of Carrie's head after she's crowned Prom Queen; a mean prank that was total #goals for Lola. When Ella didn't respond, Lola fist-bumped herself.

It did make Lola think, though. She was a shoo-in to win, of course. But who else? Jameson Eckerts had moved away over the summer, and no one else had risen to the top of the social hierarchy to fill in his place. So who else would be King? She had trouble remembering the names or faces of any of the guys in her class. They were all vaguely identical, equally forgettable; background extras on a movie set.

Across the lawn, Jackie finished the last of the grانola. His crown slipped down his horn.

"If only you could be Homecoming King," Lola said to him. She pictured standing on the stage with Jackie, crowns glimmering, her arms wrapped around his white fuzzy neck as the crowds cheered. Everyone loved uni-

corns. Why didn't people bring theirs to dances more often?

Suddenly, inspiration struck. Lola grabbed her phone and breathlessly recorded a Snap to me.

"Kate! I've got it! You can't come to the dance because you have to sit for Betsy and Tacy. But who says you have to sit for them at home? Why not bring them to the dance? No one's ever been brave enough to bring these wild creatures to a social event — let alone THE social event of the year. We'll be famous! Snap me back and tell me what a great idea this is. I know, I'm so genius, I can't stand it. BYE."

When I got the Snap a few minutes later — I don't check my phone nearly as much as Lola does, I have a life — I nearly burst with excitement.

It was the perfect solution. I would bring Betsy and Tacy with me to the dance. I'd be careful, of course, and I'd have to check with Mrs. Martin, but it also meant I could have fun! And be with my friends! And accept all the compliments everyone would be tossing my way for the amazing dance decorations and our outstanding cheerleading halftime routine!

Lola didn't often think about how to help other people. But wow, when she did? She nailed it.



## FIVE

I SAILED INTO THURSDAY IN super high spirits. I couldn't wait to talk to the Club about Lola's great idea, but first I had to get through a jam-packed day – a final meeting of the dance decoration committee, where Mr. Montgomery, our faculty advisor, told me I was the most creative decorator he'd ever met after I showed him all our plans involving klieg lights and smoke machines; a pop quiz in physics; an abbreviated chorus practice; and then a quick team workout where I led the cheerleading squad through a 5k run and an arm routine in the school gym. I was high on adrenaline! Definitely not

drugs!

I wanted to take a break when I got home but I couldn't, because NiNi and Samantha were watching a movie together in the den, and there was no way I'd sacrifice quality time with NiNi. (Plus, I'd heard Yale loves a student who volunteers with elderly and/or at-risk youth, which Samantha, with her singular focus on schooling, probably qualifies as.) During the movie Samantha kept giving me funny looks, but I was in such a good mood I dismissed them.

Finally it was time to get ready for the Club meeting. I made a pit stop in the kitchen to get some provisions—popcorn and a six-pack of La Croix—and bounded up the stairs. To my surprise, I was the first one in my room. I glanced at my watch and saw that, technically, the meeting didn't start for another two minutes. But I liked my employees, I mean friends, to be very prompt. They were cutting it close. Still, I made the most of the extra time by skimming through the latest entry in the Club notebook.

Here's what I read:

*Had a quick job at the Delaney house, sitting for Lady. It was normal. The Delaneys had an early dinner date. They left their two kids, Emma and Jackson, upstairs playing with their toys, unsupervised. I wonder why they didn't just call a*

*baby-sitter?*

*Anyway, Lady was great. She's an easy uni. I fed her, brushed her pretty hair, and had just started braiding it when the Delaneys returned. They did not seem happy with each other and it was an awfully short date, if you ask me. So I left early and went to the Double Bee. No one was there, so it was boring. That's all.*

I frowned and squinted my eyes at the bottom of Dee's journal entry. There, in different font, was an addition:

**I would've been at the Delaneys, too, if Dee had remembered to tell me. And there were totally people at the Double Bee — me and Hunter, for one. Dee even sat with us and finished our food. Guys, do you think Dee needs some bloodwork or something to make sure she's not sick? Maybe she's stressed or overtired and it's causing memory loss. Kate, I move to block Dee from any future sitting jobs until she gets the all-clear.**

I shook my head. Margo was SO pathetic.



By then I realized I'd been so involved in thinking about the Club that time had flown, and the others were definitely, certainly, clearly late to the meeting. It was already five after seven!

I quickly checked my texts—nothing. I checked my Snaps, DMs, Stories, PMs—nothing. Where *was* everyone?

Well, if they couldn't bother being on time for an important meeting like this one, fine. I'd just call it to order without them. Without *anybody*. That'd show them.

The problem was, calling a meeting to order when you're by yourself just feels weird. Kind of sad, even. I banged the gavel and pulled out my clipboard, impressing absolutely no one, and then I just sat there, stewing in my growing anger, waiting for the phone to ring.

After ten whole minutes of waiting, my mind started wandering. Don't tell anyone this, but I actually began to worry. What if something had happened to Lola or Dee? (Or Margo?) I mean, the possibilities were endless. They could have:

- Gotten stuck in a fluke snowstorm on their way home from the mall, which totally happened to a friend of ours. She and her mom had to spend the evening with strangers who were obsessed with Christmas even though it was barely autumn. Scary!
- Gone sailing and gotten lost at sea...or stranded on a desert island! I'd heard there were remote islands way off the coast of New Jersey. I think some cousins of my mom's had kids who had been in a sailing competition and the weather had turned and

they'd ended up foraging for food and shelter for several days. Can you imagine?

- Discovered some big Stoney Valley mystery and were trying to solve it. Like maybe they were exploring the house over on Pike Street that everyone knows is haunted; or they'd gotten caught up in the drama surrounding old Mrs. Porter, who everyone thought was a witch. Dee and Margo's little brother, Aiden, was obsessed with her, so it was possible.

The more I thought about what could have happened to the rest of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club, the more anxious I got. I paced my bedroom. I drank La Croix after La Croix, until my throat was raw and my stomach ached. Then I munched on the popcorn to try to make the stomachache disappear, which was probably not the smartest move, because I had a Homecoming dress to fit into later that week.

Finally, when they were nearly twenty minutes late, I broke down and called Lola.

Would you believe that animal didn't answer a call from her very best friend?

But Dee, my number two, was my next call, and she did.

"Dee!" I practically screamed. "Where are you? Is everyone okay? Do you need me to call the police? Or the Coast Guard? Or the Ghost Busters?"

"Huh?" Dee's voice crackled as the connection went in and out. "Kate, what are you on about?"

"You're almost half an hour late for the meeting!" I yelled. I knew I sounded angry but inside, my stomach

was roiling with relief. I may give off the perception of being a super cool, chill, calm, in-control leader, but even people like me crack sometimes.

“Kate. No I’m not. It’s only six-thirty. The meeting doesn’t start until seven.”

“It IS seven! In fact, it’s seven THIRTY!” I screamed. I was out of breath, my (nonexistent) chest heaving. “And none of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club members are here!”

“Don’t yell at me!” Dee snapped. Her voice crackled again and I wondered where she was. “I promise you, it’s only six-thirty. You can’t yell at me for being late to a meeting that hasn’t started yet!”

I pointed at the alarm clock on my nightstand, even though of course Dee couldn’t see it. Sharp blue lines read zero-seven-two-eight.

“Clocks don’t lie!” I raged.

“Well your clock must!” I heard Dee click her tongue. “If you’re going to keep screaming at me, I’m just going to hang up on you. You’re being completely unhinged.”

I struggled to breathe. In, out, in, out. I closed my eyes, feeling the burning hot fire of my rage diminishing to a simmer. I couldn’t afford to have Dee be mad at me, not with Lola being so distant these days, doing whatever it was she was doing.

I was quiet for so long that Dee spoke again. This time her voice was softer.

“Listen, senior year is a stressful time. We’re all feeling the pressures. I get it. I’ve exploded on Margo more times than I can count. Go have a candy bar or some-

thing—maybe you need to get your blood sugar up and you'll feel better? Is it possible you're diabetic? And we'll all be there when the meeting starts." Dee paused and added, pointedly, "In half an hour."

Then her line disconnected. I stared at my phone in disbelief. She'd hung up on me? SHE'D hung up on ME?

But before I could let my anger get the best of me again, I noticed something else about my phone: the time said it was eleven fifty-five. Huh?

I rebooted. When it powered up again, it read three-seventeen. I glanced back at my alarm clock. One-thirty. What the heck was happening?

Then I heard a muffled snort.

In an instant, I knew: I'd been had.

"SAMANTHA!" I screamed. I marched out to the hallway, where I found my creepy little sister nearly in hysterics, bent over from laughing. I punched her, hard, in her devious little shoulder.

"Ow!" She yelped in between laughs. She looked up at me, tears streaming from her eyes from her joy. She pointed at me and laughed some more.

"You little jerk!" I pounded on her arm again. "What did you do?"

"I-hacked-your-clocks!" she gasped. She was still crouched down on the hall floor, wheezing and trying to catch her breath. "You-should've-seen-your-face!"

God, I felt like such an asshole. I whacked Samantha again. "Why?" I demanded.

"It was a stupid competition in computer club," she gasped. She finally straightened up as her hysterics sub-

sided. She wiped her eyes again. “We all had to hack someone in our families. You’re so fixated on the time, I figured your clocks would be the most fun.”

“Well I hope it was worth it,” I said in the coldest voice I could muster. “Because I’m gonna get you back SO hard.”

Samantha looked at me, her face blank, for a long moment. Then her shoulders began shaking, and I realized she was trying to hold back laughter, which made me even more angry.

“Sure, Kate,” she choked, struggling to keep her expression neutral.

“NI-NIIIII!” I screamed suddenly, and Samantha jumped. Then, quick as lightning, she ran down the hall and disappeared into her room.

“Ugh,” I muttered, retreating into my own room and slamming the door.

So much for being Presidential.

In the time it took me to fix all my clocks, I had calmed down. Mostly. At six-fifty-nine there was a soft knock on my door, which I’d kept closed in an effort to forget I had a family.

Dee, Margo, and Lola all trooped in together, the twins in similar outfits (black jeans and a green flannel for Dee, and black pants and a green sweater for Margo) and Lola in some expensive-looking shiny jacket and cool, loose-fitting checkered pants. Her dangly earrings glimmered, and her hair was super shiny. I looked doubtfully down at my own outfit — old jeans that were both too big and too small at the same time (is it possible I borrowed them from NiNi? Unclear.) and a long-

sleeved purple shirt that had definitely seen better days. My Chuck Taylors had holes through which my big toes were visible, and I couldn't remember the last time I'd brushed my hair *or* my teeth. I shrugged internally. I had more important qualities than dressing well. I was a good person *inside*, where it mattered.

I couldn't meet Dee's eyes. "This meeting of the Super Sweet Unicorn Club is now called to order," I announced. "Any club business?"

"Dues day!" Dee said gleefully. Everyone groaned, including me, and ponied up some cash. We each contributed monthly to a general Club pool of money, which was used in lots of ways—to contribute to my phone bill, to help replenish any Uni-Kits that were in need of supplies, and to occasionally treat ourselves to a smoothie-and-kale-salad party. (Lola's in charge of team activities.)

Once Dee had collected all our money, I tried to regain my presidential stature, but I felt way out of sorts. I was grateful when Lola kicked off a discussion.

"Kate, did you tell everyone about my amazing idea?" She wiggled her perfectly groomed eyebrows up and down. Seriously, how did she do that with her brows? They were gorgeous. I self-consciously smoothed mine down while Lola explained to Margo and Dee that she had come up with the perfect solution for my unicorn-sitting problem: to bring Betsy and Tacy to the Homecoming dance with me.

"So you cleared the idea with Ms. Martin?" Margo asked. I was busy peeling back my cuticles, though, and didn't hear her. Dee waved her hands in front of my

face.

“Earth to Kate!”

I blinked. “Sorry, what?”

“I said, did you clear the idea with Ms. Martin already?” Margo smiled helpfully. “I’m happy to help.”

“I’m going to call her as soon as the meeting is over,” I said breezily, “but I’m not worried. Who wouldn’t want their unicorns to attend the Homecoming dance? They’ll be total stars!”

Speaking of eyebrows, matching creases formed in between both Dee and Margo’s. But that was silly, right? Ms. Martin wouldn’t reject my idea. It was genius!

We took only one call during the rest of the meeting, and it was a wrong number.

“Slow week,” Lola remarked. I glared at her.

“Well, while we’re waiting for a call...can I talk to you guys about something?” Margo asked. I sighed so loud that Dee actually glared at me.

“I guess,” I said dully.

Margo cleared her throat. “I’m thinking of breaking up with Hunter.”

We all stared at her.

“Who?” Lola finally asked.

But Margo continued as if she hadn’t heard us. “I’m really mad at him. I think. But I also love him. But...oh, I don’t know! It’s all so confusing!” Margo collapsed back onto the bed in a puff of teenage drama.

Dee, Lola, and I exchanged glances. Then I pointedly glared at Dee. Margo was *her* problem.

“That sucks, Margo,” Dee said weakly, then brightened up as the phone rang. But, this time, it was a spoof

call.

“Well, no time like the present,” Dee pushed, changing subjects. “Let’s call Ms. Martin now, while we’re all here and can offer moral support!”

“Fine,” I said. I was eager to prove to them all how simple this would be. After I dialed, I put her on speaker so everyone could see how the magic was made.

“Hello?” Ms. Martin answered.

“Hi, Ms. Martin! It’s me, Kate Davis!” I mustered so much enthusiasm, my throat hurt. “I was calling to confirm my sitting appointment with Betsy and Tacy this Saturday.”

“Oh, thanks, Kate. Yes, confirmed. Bye!”

“Wait!” I said, losing a bit of my cool. “Don’t hang up!”

“Okayyyy...What is it?” Ms. Martin said. *Phew.* She was still on the line.

“Well, I wanted to run an idea past you, actually.” I resolved to incorporate “actually” into my vocabulary more. It felt very British and mature. “Actually, this Saturday is the Stoney Valley High School Homecoming dance. As you probably know, I’m the head of the dance committee. And of course, I’ll be cheering during the game that day, too, as head cheerleader,” I rushed to add.

I paused to allow some space for Ms. Martin to respond to my impressive extracurriculars, but the line was silent.

I cleared my throat. “Anyway, actually, I was thinking, how wonderful would it be for me to bring Betsy and Tacy to the dance with me? Not only would they get



the same high quality of care you can expect from the Super Sweet Unicorn Club, but they'll be the first unicorns to attend a Homecoming dance – at least in the history of Stoney Valley. They'll make the front page of the Stoney Valley Gazette—that's our school paper, which I edit—and I bet they'll even start trending on Twitter and Instagram. I can dress them up with crowns and sashes. Everyone will love it! But most of all, Betsy and Tacy themselves will have so much fun!”

I huffed as silently as I could, trying to catch my breath after that rambling outburst.

But Ms. Martin didn't say anything.

Next to me, Dee reassuringly put her hand on my arm. I knew then that all was forgiven between us. Fights about late meetings are silly when compared to real stuff like this.

“Hello?” I squeaked.

“I'm here,” Ms. Martin said. Then she sighed deeply. My stomach tightened. That damn LaCroix! “I'm surprised by you, Kate. Normally you're the most responsible of all the Super Sweet Unicorn Club members. I can't believe you'd present this idea to me. It's positively preposterous.”

My jaw dropped. Dee, Lola, and Margo all gasped too, but silently, thankfully, since Ms. Martin didn't know they were listening in.

“But—“

“No. Sorry, Kate. It's not even an option. Betsy and Tacy are unicorn royalty, and must be protected at all costs. I don't even let them roam off my property. What makes you think it would be safe to bring them to a

school dance?! It's too dangerous." Ms. Martin paused.  
"And frankly.."

My insides were swirling. My tongue felt too big.

"Frankly, Kate, I'm so disappointed, I'm not even sure I can trust the Super Sweet Unicorn Club at all anymore."