

**fake**  
*boyfriend*

by  
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“Who would *ever* buy something like that?” Vivi Swayne grabbed the *Lucky* magazine her friend Lane Morris was holding. It was open to a page full of hideous black-and-white dresses that looked like they’d walked out of an *Alice in Wonderland* nightmare—all checkerboard patterns and ridiculously poufy skirts. It was only one month until their prom, and neither of them had a dress yet. But if this was the junk the fashion world was offering, Vivi thought she might be better off without one. “I wouldn’t even wear one of those on a dare.”

“Please. You’ve never taken a dare in your life,” Lane pointed out, leaning back in the green vinyl booth at Lonnie’s Bagels and Coffee Shop, sipping her chai. All around them, groups of kids from Westmont High chatted, sipped their coffees, and noshed on Lonnie’s famous chocolate desserts. The brightly lit family-owned place was all chrome accents,

fluorescent lights, and old-school counters and booths, yet somehow it managed to maintain a cozy appeal. During the morning rush it catered to frenzied commuters and their caffeine addictions before they hopped the train to New York City. During lunch it was *the* local destination for deli sandwiches. But in the evening it was a favorite hangout for the Westmont High population, and it had enough designer coffees and sweets on the menu to keep their sugar rushes rushing all night long.

“It’s true,” Curtis Miles added from across the table, gesturing with a decadent-looking forkful of chocolate cake.

Lane blushed fiercely under her freckles and pulled her long red hair over her shoulder so she could busy herself with tugging at it. Vivi had come to recognize it as a nervous gesture—one that was most often inspired by Curtis. Even though the two of them had been neighbors since they were on tricycles, Lane had been harboring a huge crush on Curtis for the past couple of years. Curtis, however, was totally and completely clueless that he inspired it.

“I’ve taken a dare!” Vivi protested, snatching the fork from Curtis’s hand. She took a huge bite of the cake and pushed the plate back across the table. “What about the time I ate that entire carton of Chubby Hubby in ten minutes?”

“Yeah, but you wanted to do that anyway,” Lane said.

Vivi deflated slightly. “Okay, fine. So I don’t like it when other people tell me what to do. That’s not news.” Vivi pulled her long legs up underneath her on the bench. She tossed the mag aside and picked up her black-and-white cookie, taking a bite out of the white side. Slumping down, she settled back

next to Lane and moved her head around until she found a comfortable position—one that kept the rubber band holding her thick blond ponytail from jabbing into the back of her head. “Where the hell is Isabelle already?” Isabelle and Vivi had been best friends since they shared a desk pod together in first grade, and when they met Lane and Curtis in middle school, the four melded together in a perfect little foursome. Even though Curtis didn’t always chill with them now, they were still all really close and had promised Izzy they would meet to talk about prom, since, naturally, they were all going together. “You told her Lonnie’s, right? Not Starbucks?”

“Why would we tell her Starbucks? We never go to Starbucks. It’s evil,” Curtis said, glaring out the window at the new shop that had gone up across the street last winter.

“Please. You’re addicted to their Frappuccinos,” Vivi scoffed.

“They do make a mean Frappuccino,” Curtis agreed, staring into his plain coffee.

“Curtis! God!” Vivi whacked his arm. “Lonnie’s right *there*.”

They all glanced over at the elderly proprietor behind the counter, who seemed to live in her shop. She was currently counting out change for Kim Wolfe, one of their classmates. Normally loud and totally obnoxious, Kim waited patiently, snapping her gum, as Lonnie sifted out her pennies one by one. Everyone was patient for Lonnie. The woman was an institution.

“It’s not like she can hear us,” Lane said, lowering her voice.

“She turns her hearing aid down when the place is this

JP'd" Curtis added, shoving his long brown bangs away from his big brown eyes.

"JP'd?" Vivi asked impatiently.

"Jam-packed," Curtis said with a shrug.

"Okay, the whole initializing everything is getting beyond annoying," Vivi told him.

"Tell me how you really feel," Curtis shot back, smoothing his bangs back again.

Just then, the front door opened and in walked their significant fourth, Isabelle Hunter. Tonight, Izzy looked as perfect as ever in a pink turtleneck sweater, skinny jeans, and black ankle boots. Her cocoa-colored skin was blemish-free, her straight hair pulled back in a white headband, and tiny diamonds sparkled in her ears.

"Omgod! You guys are so gonna love me!" Isabelle squealed, rushing over to their table. She slapped a pink binder down on the table with the word PROM spelled across the cover in big glitter letters.

"Uh, you really sure you want to bring that thing out in public?" Vivi asked as Izzy scooted in next to Curtis. It was Isabelle's infamous Prom Planner, which she'd been working on since ninth grade.

"Uh, yeah, I do. Since it has inside . . ." Isabelle rifled through the many colorful, dog-eared pages filled with dresses, flowers, limos, jewelry, shoes, bags, and other random photos she'd cut out of magazines over the years, and she yanked out a yellow sheet from the back. "Ta-da!" she announced, holding it up with a huge grin. "One receipt for a white Mercedes stretch limo!"

“What!?” Vivi gasped, grabbing the page.

“I booked it this afternoon. It’s perfect and it’s all ours,” Isabelle said giddily. “It fits four couples, so we’re all in!”

“Iz, this is so OTH!” Curtis said.

“Off the hook?” Isabelle guessed.

Vivi saw the rental fee total at the bottom of the page and whistled under her breath. “Uh, Iz? This is, like, Mount Everest steep.”

“It’s already paid for,” Isabelle said, waving a hand. “I got graduation money from my grandparents, and it was about four times as much as I thought it was going to be.”

“You’re kidding,” Lane said. Isabelle’s grandfather, a former NBA superstar, was always bestowing insane gifts on his grandkids. “Isabelle, that’s incredible.”

“In that case, wanna pay for my tux, too?” Curtis joked, gulping down his coffee.

“Why not? I paid for Shawn’s,” Isabelle said, grabbing Lane’s unused fork and digging into Curtis’s cake.

Lane, Vivi, and Curtis exchanged a look of doom. “You didn’t,” Vivi said.

Isabelle shrugged. “This is what people do when they’re in a mature relationship, Vivi,” she replied, taking on the tone of a kindergarten teacher.

“Yeah, or when they’re in a relationship where one person is totally taking advantage of the other,” Vivi muttered. A comment that Isabelle ignored, as usual.

Vivi, however, was officially irritated. Isabelle was valedictorian of their class, captain of the girls’ varsity basketball team; she never drank, smoked, or cursed, and had recently

received a commendation from the mayor of their small New Jersey town for her volunteer work with Meals on Wheels. She'd been accepted early admission to Stanford University. She was the class's crown jewel. Her boyfriend, Shawn Littig, however, was the class screwup. Shawn was constantly rolling in late, cutting class to sneak cigarettes, and talking back to teachers just to show that he could. Everyone knew he was a total jerk, but Isabelle maintained that he was just misunderstood and that no one knew Shawn the way she did. Unfortunately, Vivi had a feeling it was the other way around: Everyone in the world could read Shawn Littig like a book—a seriously trashy, bargain-bin novel, to be exact—but he had Isabelle completely and totally snowed.

“He just spent all that money on his car, so he was totally tapped out,” Isabelle explained. “And my date is not going to prom in jeans and a T-shirt.”

“Well, he should have saved. Everyone knows how important prom is to you,” Vivi said. “Or is he the only one who's never been taken on a page-by-page tour of that?” she asked, nodding at the prom book.

“Hey. Do not dis the book,” Isabelle scolded, placing a protective hand on the cover. “And yes, he has seen it. In fact, he got the exact tuxedo I picked out for him from the sophomore year *Teen Vogue* prom issue,” she added proudly. “Speaking of which, has Jeffrey rented his tux yet?”

Vivi took a deep breath. She had been hoping to avoid this conversation, but she should have known better. “Um . . . Jeffrey and I kind of broke up.” Vivi picked at a random crusty stain on the green vinyl.

“What? When?” Isabelle demanded.

“Did you know?” Lane asked Curtis, reaching across the table to smack his arm.

“Uh . . . I talked to Jeff this morning,” Curtis replied, rubbing his arm and looking snagged.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Lane demanded.

“Hello, I’m a guy. We have a code.” Curtis rolled his eyes.

“Vivi, what happened?” Isabelle interrupted. “I thought—”

Vivi held up her hands, and her friends all fell silent. “We broke up last night. No big. It had to happen eventually.”

She cracked off the black half of her cookie, folded it, and shoved the whole thing into her mouth, looking out the window in hopes of putting a quick end to the subject. Across the street, Starbucks was overflowing with freshmen and sophomores who weren’t cool enough yet to get the understated allure of Lonnie’s.

“Vivi, what happened? Why didn’t you call?” Lane asked.

“Are you okay?” Isabelle put in.

“I’m fine,” Vivi said through her mouthful of cookie. “We only went out for, like, three weeks. It’s not the end of the world.”

It wasn’t like she could actually tell them the truth. Jeffrey had told her he liked her, but said that it was pretty clear that she didn’t actually like him. Every guy Vivi had ever gone out with since middle school had said pretty much the same thing—or some variation of it.

“He broke up with you, didn’t he?” Lane said softly. Then, when Vivi didn’t answer, she groaned. “Viv, I told you that if you kept picking on him like that—”

Vivi sighed. They had had this conversation ten million times before. Daniel Lin had been Vivi's eighth-grade boyfriend. They had gone out for months, and Vivi had been crazy for him. He was smart, funny, hot, athletic, and totally attentive for an eighth-grade boy. Everything she could ever have imagined wanting in a boyfriend. And then, out of nowhere, he'd broken up with her for another girl, and Vivi had been crushed. But she had gotten over it and Daniel had moved away and that was that. Vivi thought it was mildly ridiculous that her friends thought that this one thing affected every relationship she'd had since. Vivi never even thought about Daniel except when Lane and Izzy brought him up. Well, almost never.

"Can we *please* change the subject?" Vivi asked, staring out the window again. Instantly, her heart dropped and she dropped her cookie. She could not be seeing what she was seeing. No way. No . . . freaking . . . way. She kicked Curtis under the table and nodded toward Starbucks.

Curtis looked out the window, and his eyes grew wide. "Oh my God," he said.

"What?" Isabelle asked, looking over.

"Isabelle! Don't!" Vivi said automatically. Vivi thought she was going to hyperventilate. Shawn Littig, the guy Isabelle had been dating on and off since freshman year, the guy she was so in love with that she was somehow blinded to the fact he was a total sleezeball, had just walked out of Starbucks with his arm around Tricia Blank—a sophomore who took her imitation of trashy celebute fashion way too far. And now, he was pressing her up against the brick wall of the

building, shoving his tongue so far down her throat, she was gonna need the Heimlich.

And Izzy had seen the whole thing. Her face paled, and she made a choking sound in the back of her throat.

“Oh my God,” Lane said, finally catching on. She looked fretfully at Isabelle. “Iz, it’s—”

“No. No, no, no, no, no, no, no,” Isabelle rambled.

She shoved herself out of the booth and ran outside. For a split second, Vivi was too stunned to move. Then, she, Lane, and Curtis all jumped up and followed. Isabelle stormed to the corner, where the evening traffic was lazily making its way down the road.

“Shawn!” Isabelle yelled at the top of her lungs.

Across the street, Shawn sprang away from Tricia. Isabelle quickly looked both ways, somehow judged that the oncoming Jeep Wrangler was not going to hit her, and dived into the street.

“Isabelle!” Vivi screeched, shoving her hands into the pockets of her green zip-up and running after her friend.

Curtis ran out ahead of Vivi and threw his hands up to stop traffic. The Jeep slammed on its brakes and squealed to a stop.

“What the hell are you doing?” the driver shouted.

“Sorry! Crisis in the making here,” Curtis said. He waved Vivi and Lane across the street, then quickly followed.

“What are you doing!?” Isabelle cried as all the kids on the sidewalk stopped to stare.

Shawn backed away from Tricia as if she were on fire and gaped at Isabelle. His light blue eyes darted around as

if looking for an escape route. Vivi only hoped he would try to get past her. That way she could punch him right in his infuriatingly hot face.

“Isabelle!” Shawn said, stunned.

“Oh, please. Half the school is here,” Vivi blurted, her hands curled into fists. “Did you really think you wouldn’t get caught?”

“Back off,” Shawn snapped at Vivi. “This is none of your business.”

Vivi gritted her teeth and fumed.

“What’s going on?” Isabelle asked shakily.

Shawn looked imploringly at Isabelle. “Baby . . . can we just go someplace and talk . . . on our own?”

“Hey!” Tricia protested, crossing her skinny arms over her barely-there tank top. “You told me you broke up with her.”

Vivi’s heart plummeted as Izzy’s eyes filled with tears. “What? Shawn . . . you’re breaking up with me?”

Shawn glanced around and seemed to realize there was no way out of this. He looked at the ground, his dark hair falling over his face, and shook his head. “I’m sorry, Iz . . . I’m with Tricia now.”

“With her? *With* her?” Isabelle blurted. “For how long?”

“About a month,” Tricia said smugly, sliding her arm around Shawn’s waist and snuggling into his side.

“The last—” Isabelle buckled slightly, as if she’d been kicked in the knees. All the air went right out of Vivi’s lungs. She stepped over and put her arm around Izzy. Her friend started convulsing, tears streaming down her face.

“Iz, please . . . ,” Shawn said, extricating himself from Tricia’s grasp. “I didn’t mean to hurt you. I—”

Vivi glared up at Shawn. “Walk away. Right now,” she said through her teeth.

Shawn snorted a laugh. “You can’t tell me what to do.”

“I think we just did,” Curtis said, stepping up between Shawn and the girls and getting right in Shawn’s face.

Shawn had four inches and approximately twenty pounds on Curtis, but he was showing no fear. Shawn raised his hands and backed off. Coward. Vivi knew he welcomed the excuse to bail, not to have to deal. Just like all the other times he’d broken up with Izzy—via note, e-mail, text, a message on her voice mail. It was always in the most cowardly way possible. And yet, Isabelle always took him back. Every time. No matter what.

Well, maybe that was all about to change. Izzy couldn’t forgive him this time. This time he’d *actually* cheated on her. And half the school had witnessed it.

“Isabelle, are you okay?” Lane asked as Shawn and Tricia headed for his vintage Vette, parked down the street.

“He’s been cheating on me for a month!” Isabelle blurted, hugging Lane and clinging to her light blue sweater. “A month! How is that even possible?”

“I know, Iz. I’m sorry,” Lane said, stroking her hair.

Vivi glanced around at the freshmen and sophomores, who were still looking on quietly, eavesdropping as hard as they could. Vivi glared around at the onlookers and gently pulled Izzy away and back toward the street.

“And with Tricia Blank!” Isabelle ranted. “She’s a . . . a . . .”

*Skank? Cheesebomb? Easy McSlutty?* Vivi thought.

“. . . sophomore!” Isabelle wailed.

Lane frowned sympathetically. “We know, Iz.”

“It’s gonna be okay.” Vivi put her hand on her friend’s back. Her heart felt sick. Worse than it had when Jeffrey had dumped her last night. This was Isabelle. Her best friend since grade school. Izzy’s heartache had more of an effect on Vivi than her own did. “Come on. Let’s get out of here,” Vivi said.

“I’ll go get our stuff and meet up with you guys,” Curtis said, jogging over to Lonnie’s.

“We’ll go back to my house and . . . I don’t know . . . come up with a revenge plan,” Vivi said comfortingly. “Between us we should definitely be able to whip up a voodoo doll,” she joked, trying to lighten the mood.

Isabelle choked a laugh and nodded through a fresh wave of tears. “Okay.” Vivi had a feeling the girl would agree to anything right then.

“Don’t worry, Iz,” Lane said as they headed down the street toward the municipal parking lot and Vivi’s car. “Everything’s gonna be okay.”

“Yeah, it is, because if the voodoo doll doesn’t work, I’m going to go over there and kick his ass. Believe me,” Vivi said, determined. “That idiot has broken your heart for the last time.”



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