



Princess

in the spotlight



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MEG CABOT

“When things are horrible--just horrible--I think as hard as ever I can of being a princess. I say to myself, ‘I am a princess.’ You don’t know how it makes you forget.”

--A Little Princess, Frances Hodgson Burnett

Monday, October 20

When I woke up this morning, my throat hurt so much, I couldn’t even talk. I could only croak.

I tried croaking for my mom for a while, but she couldn’t hear me. She’s a pretty heavy sleeper, especially since she discovered kava-kava, the Polynesian relaxation root, at Rite-Aid.

So then I tried banging on the wall, but all that did was make my Greenpeace poster fall down.

Finally I had no choice but to get up. I wrapped my comforter around me so I wouldn’t get a chill and get even sicker, and went down the hall to my mom’s room, where I shook her awake, croaked that I was sick, and told her that she’d have to call the attendance office and explain that I wouldn’t be in to school today.

I also asked her to call and cancel my limo, and to

let Lilly know we wouldn't be stopping by to pick her up.

I also told her that if she was going to go to the studio, she'd have to get my dad or my bodyguard to come to the loft and make sure no one tried to kidnap or assassinate me while she was gone and I was in my weakened physical state.

I think she understood me, but it was hard to tell. I tell you, this princess business is no joke.

Later on Monday

My mom stayed home from the studio today.

I croaked to her that she shouldn't. She has a show at the Mary Boone Gallery in about a month, and I know she only has about half the paintings done that she's supposed to have.

But she stayed home anyway. About every ten minutes, she comes in and asks me if I want anything. I forgot she has a Florence Nightengale complex. She keeps making me tea, and cinnamon toast with the crusts cut off. This is very nice, I must say.

Then she tried to get me to let some zinc dissolve on my tongue, as one of her friends told her this is supposedly a good way to combat the common cold.

That was not so nice.

She felt bad about it when the zinc made me gag a whole bunch. She even ran down to the deli and bought me one of those king-size Crunch bars to make up for it.

Later she tried to make me bacon and eggs in order to build up my strength, but there I drew the line: Just because I'm on my deathbed does not mean it's okay to abandon all of my vegetarian principles.

My mother just took my temperature. Ninety-nine point six.

If this were medieval times, I would probably be dead.

Temperature Chart:

11:45AM--99.2

12:14PM--99.1

1:27PM--98.6

This stupid thermometer must be broken!

2:05PM--99.0

3:35PM--99.1

Even later on Monday

Lilly just stopped by. She brought me all of my homework. She says I look wretched, and that I sound like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*. I've never seen *The Exorcist*, so I don't know if this is true or not. I don't like movies where people's heads spin around, or where things come bursting out of their stomach.

Lilly says everybody at school today was talking about what happened on Saturday night, when I was publicly humiliated by Josh Richter. Lilly says it was really Josh who was humiliated, not me, but I know the truth: being asked to a dance by a boy because he wants to get his picture on the cover of *Teen People*, and not because he actually likes you, is the height of humiliation.

Anyway, Lilly says Josh is going around acting like nothing happened. Like that he didn't grab and kiss me in front of all those reporters that showed up at

our school because the newly discovered Princess of Genovia, Mia Thermopolis Renaldo, was going to her first dance, and they wanted to be sure to get a picture of it for their Star Tracks page. Thank God for Iran bombing Afghanistan this weekend, or I swear, my face would have been plastered all over Page Six of the New York Post. My face, all smashed up against Josh Richter's. I think my fever just went up from the embarrassment of it all.

Anyway, one of the ways Josh is pretending like Saturday never happened is that he got back together with Lana Weinberger. I personally cannot believe this, but Lilly swears it's true: when she went by my locker to get my books, Lana was standing there in her cheerleader uniform, waiting for Josh, whose locker is next to mine, as if nothing had happened. Then, when Josh showed up, he and Lana slipped into the Suck Zone, making it impossible for Lilly to close my locker door again

(how well I know that problem). Lilly resolved the situation pretty quickly, however, by accidentally-on-purpose stabbing Josh in the spine with the tip of her number two pencil.

Does Lana Weinberger have no pride? Josh totally broke up with her so he could ask me to the Cultural Diversity Dance, instead of her. She had to return the dress she'd bought for it and everything. I saw her crying in the Girls' Room.

And then she takes him back, like it was all just a big misunderstanding.

I am sorry, but if it were me, I would never take him back, not even if he pulled a Lloyd Dobbler and stood in front of my window in a trench coat in the rain holding up a boom box playing Peter Gabriel.

I'm sure all he had to do to get Lana back was call her.

Anyway, I have about a ton of homework. Even my mother's own boyfriend, who you would think would feel an iota of sympathy towards me, loaded me down with it. I tell you, there isn't a single perk

to having your mother date your Algebra teacher. Not a single one. Well, except when he comes over for dinner and helps me with the assignment. He doesn't give me the answers, though, so I mostly get sixty-eights. And that's still a D.

And I am really sick now! My temperature has gone up to ninety-nine point eight! Soon it will reach one hundred.

If this were an episode of ER, they'd have practically put me on a respirator already.

My mom has her humidifier in here, going on full blast. Lilly says my room is like a mini-Vietnam, and why don't I at least crack the window, for God's sake.

What's worse, our English teacher says we have to complete a journal this semester. I am not kidding. A journal. Like I don't already keep one.

And get this: At the end of every week, we're supposed to turn our journals in. For Mrs. Spears to read. I can't possibly turn this journal in. There's all

sorts of stuff in here I don't want anyone to know. Like how the other day in my very own kitchen I saw my Algebra teacher in his underwear. Or how sometimes I'd like to Darth Maul my grandmother. Or how I sort of like Lilly's older brother Michael. I have decided I will just have to start a new journal. A fake journal. Instead of recording my innermost emotions and feelings in it, I'll just write a bunch of lies, and hand that in instead. I am such an accomplished liar, Mrs. Spears won't know the difference.

Lilly is not really a very soothing visitor to have when you are sick. She suggested that it was possible that I have consumption, just like Elizabeth Barrett Browning. I said I thought it was probably only bronchitis, and Lilly said that's probably what Elizabeth Barrett Browning thought, too.

And then she died.

Homework:

Algebra: problems at the end of Chapter ten

English: start a journal; begin by introducing yourself

World Civ: one thousand word essay explaining the conflict between Iran and Afghanistan

Gifted and Talented: As if

French: ecrivez une vignette amusant (Oh, right)

Biology: endocrine system

God! What are they trying to do over there, anyway? Kill us?

Tuesday, October 20

This morning my mom called my dad where he's staying at the Plaza, and made him bring the limo over so I could go to the doctor. This is because when she took my temperature after I woke up, it was one hundred and two!

So my mom made me get dressed. I was so feverish I actually put on one of the outfits Grandmere bought me. So there I was in Chanel from head to toe, with my eyes all glassy and this sheen of sweat all over me. My dad jumped about a foot and a half

when he saw me, I think because he thought for a minute that I was Grandmere. Only of course I am much taller than Grandmere, even though my hair isn't so big.

It turns out that Dr. Fung is one of the few people in America who hadn't heard yet that I'm a princess now, so we had to sit in the waiting room for like ten minutes before he could see me. My dad spent the ten minutes talking to the receptionist. That's because she was wearing an outfit that showed her navel. Lars sat next to me, reading Parenting magazine. I could tell he would have preferred the latest copy of Soldier of Fortune, but they don't have a subscription to that at the SoHo Family Medical Practice.

Finally Dr. Fung saw me. He took my temperature (one hundred and one point seven) and felt my glands to see if they were swollen (they were). Then he tried to take a throat culture to check for strep. Only when he jabbed that thing into my mouth, it made me gag so hard, I started coughing

uncontrollably. I couldn't stop coughing, so I told him between coughs that I was going to get a drink of water. I think I must have been delusional because of my fever and all, since what I did instead of getting water was walk right out of the doctor's office. I got back into the limo and told the chauffeur to take me to Emerald Planet right away, so I could get a smoothie.

Fortunately the chauffeur knew better than to take me somewhere without my bodyguard. He got on the radio and said some stuff, and then Lars came out to the limo with my dad, who yelled at me.

Dr. Fung was pretty nice about it in the end. He gave up on the throat culture and prescribed some antibiotics and this cough syrup with codeine in it. But not until he had one of his nurses take a picture of us shaking hands together inside the limo, so he could hang it on his wall of celebrity photos. He has pictures of himself up there shaking hands with other famous patients of his, like Robert Goulet and Lou Reed.

Now that my raging fever has gone down, I can see that I was behaving completely irrationally. I would have to say that that trip to the doctor's office was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. Of course, there's been so many, it's hard to tell where this one ranks. I think I would chalk it up there with the time I accidentally dropped my dinner plate in the buffet line at Lilly's bat mitzvah, and everybody kept stepping in gefiltefish for the rest of the night.

Mia Thermopolis's Top Five Most Embarrassing Moments:

1. Josh Richter kissing me in front of the whole school while everyone looked at me.
2. The time when I was six and Grandmere ordered me to hug her sister, Tante Jean Marie, and I started to cry because I was afraid of Jean Marie's mustache, and hurt Jean Marie's feelings.
3. The time when I was seven and Grandmere forced me to attend a boring cocktail party she gave

for all her friends, and I was so bored I picked up this little ivory coaster holder which was shaped like a rickshaw, and then I wheeled it around the coffee table, making noises like I was speaking Chinese, until all the coasters fell out the back of the rickshaw and rolled around on the floor very noisily, and everyone looked at me. (This is even more embarrassing when I think of it now, because imitating Chinese people is very politically incorrect.)

4. The time when I was ten and Grandmere took me and some of my cousins to the beach and I forgot my bikini top and Grandmere wouldn't let me go back to the chateau to get it, she said this was France for God's sake and I should just go topless like everybody else, and even though I didn't have anything more up there to show than I do now, I was mortified and wouldn't take my shirt off and everyone looked at me because they thought I had a rash or disfiguring birthmark or something.

5. The time when I was twelve and I got my first period, and I was at Grandmere's house and I had

to tell her about it because I didn't have any pads or anything, and later that night as I walked in for dinner I overheard Grandmere telling all her friends about it, and then for the rest of the night all they did was make jokes about the wonder of womanhood.

Now that I think about it, almost all of the most embarrassing moments of my life have something to do with Grandmere.

I wonder what Lilly's parents, who are both psychoanalysts, would have to say about this.

Temperature Chart:

5:20PM--99.3

6:45PM--99.2

7:52PM--99.1

Is it possible I am getting better already? Antibiotics are wonderful things. Thank you, Selman Waksman!

.MY ENGLISH JOURNAL

An Introduction

Name: Amelia Mignonette Grimaldi Thermopolis Renaldo

Known as Mia for short.

Her Royal Highness Princess Mia in some circles.

Age: Fourteen

Yr in School: Freshman

Sex: Haven't had it yet. Ha, ha, just kidding, Mrs. Spears!

Ostensibly female, but lack of chest lends disturbing androgyny.

Description: Five foot nine

Short mouse brown hair (new blonde highlights)

Grey eyes

Size ten shoe

The rest is not worth remarking.

Parents: Mother: Helen Thermopolis

Occupation: Painter

Father: Artur Christoff Philippe Gerard Grimaldi Renaldo

Occupation: Prince of Genovia

Marital Status: Because I am the result of a fling my mother and father had in college, they never married (each other) and are both currently single.

It is probably better this way, since all they ever do is fight.

Address: I have lived all of my life in New York City with my mother, except for summers, which I have traditionally spent with my father at his mother's chateau in France. My father's primary residence is Genovia, a small country in Europe located on the Mediterranean between the Italian and French border. For a long time, I was led to believe that my father was an important politician in Genovia, like the mayor, or something. Nobody told me that he was actually a member of the Genovian royal family--that he was, in fact, the reigning monarch, Genovia being a principality. I guess nobody ever would have told me, either, if my dad hadn't gotten testicular cancer and become sterile, making me, his illegitimate daughter, the only heir he'll ever have to his throne. Ever since he finally let me in on this slightly important little secret (a month ago) Dad has been living at the Plaza Hotel here in New York, while his mother,

my grandmere, the Dowager Princess, teaches me what I need to know in order to be his heir.

For which I can only say: Thanks. Thanks a whole lot.

I am too weak from coughing to write more. It probably is consumption, after all.

Wednesday, October 21

This morning my mom handed me a letter that she said had come in the mail yesterday, only she forgot to give it to me.

This wasn't like the electricity or cable bills my mom usually forgets about after they have arrived. This was a personal letter to me.

Still, since the address on the front of it was typed, I didn't suspect anything out of the ordinary. I thought it was a letter from school, or something. Like maybe I'd made honor roll (HA HA). Except that there was no return address, and usually mail from Albert Einstein High School has Albert's thoughtful face in the left-hand corner, along with

the school's address.

So you can imagine my surprise when I opened the letter and found not a flier asking me to show my school spirit by making Rice Krispy treats for a bake sale to raise money for the crew team, but the following...which for want of a better word, I can only call a love letter:

Dear Mia (the letter went)

I know you will think it's strange, receiving a letter like this. I feel strange writing it. And yet I am too shy to tell you face-to-face what I'm about to tell you now: And that's that I think you are the Josiest girl I've ever met.

I know that after what happened Saturday night, you are probably feeling pretty down. But take my word for it, Josh Richter couldn't tell a real woman from one of those oars he and the rest of the screw team are always fondling.

I just want to make sure you know that there's one person, anyway, who liked you before he ever knew you were a princess...

And will keep on liking you, no matter what.

Sincerely,

A Friend

Oh my God!

I can't believe it! I've never gotten a letter like this before. Who could it be from? I seriously can't figure it out. The letter is typed, like the address on the envelope. Not by a typewriter, either, but obviously on a computer.

So even if I wanted to compare keystrokes, say, on a suspect's typewriter (like Jan did on *The Brady Bunch* when she suspected Alice of sending her that locket) I couldn't. You can't compare the type on laser printers, for God's sake.

But who could have sent me such a thing?

Of course, I know who I want to have sent it.

But is Michael Moscovitz really the type of guy who'd say I was the Josiest girl in school? I mean, Michael doesn't even watch the Cartoon Network, as far as I know. He never misses an episode of *National Geographic Explorer*, but I sincerely

doubt he's ever seen Josie and the Pussycats.

Plus I've never heard him call the crew team the screw team.

Then again, maybe the writer meant Josie Bisset from Melrose Place. I do have short blonde hair like hers. Only I am not divorced from a philanderer named Michael....

Oh my God! Josie Bisset's husband on Melrose was named Michael! Maybe it's a clue!

Except so far as I know, Michael's never watched an episode of Melrose Place, either. He generally only watches PBS, the Sci Fi Channel and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Maybe if the letter had said I think you are the Buffiest girl I've ever met....

But if it isn't from Michael, who could it be from? I don't know that many boys, except for my dad and my bodyguard and Lilly's boyfriend Boris.

Oh my God, if this is from my dad, I will kill him. I could just see him doing something like this to cheer me up. Yesterday he brought me a Beauty and the Beast activity book so I'd have something to do in bed all day. An activity book! What does he think

I am, ten?

Although you have to give him props for the thought, I guess. Besides, the stickers look kind of cool on my Algebra book.

This is all so exciting, I want to call someone and tell them. Only who? Everyone I know is in school.
WHY DID I HAVE TO GET SICK THIS WEEK????

Later on Wednesday, October 21

This afternoon I saw the best episode of Baywatch I've ever seen.

Really.

See, Mitch met this girl with this very fake French accent during a boat race, and they totally fell in love and ran around in the waves to this excellent soundtrack, and then it turned out the girl was engaged to Mitch's opponent in the boat race, and not only that, but she was actually the princess

of this small European country Mitch had never heard of. Her fiancé was this prince her father had betrothed her to at birth!

While I was watching this, Lilly came over with my new homework assignments, and she started watching with me, and she totally missed the deep philosophical importance of the episode. All she said was, “Boy, does that royal chick need an eyebrow waxing.”

I was appalled.

“Lilly,” I croaked. “Can’t you see that this episode of Baywatch is prophetic? It is entirely possible that I have been betrothed since birth to some prince I’ve never even met, and my dad just hasn’t told me yet. And I could very likely meet some lifeguard on a beach and fall madly in love with him, but it won’t matter, because I will have to do my duty and marry the man my people have picked out for me.”

Lilly said, “Hello, exactly how much of that cough medicine have you had today? It says one teaspoon every four hours, not tablespoon, dorkus.”

I was annoyed at Lilly for failing to see the bigger

picture. I couldn't, of course, tell her about the letter I'd gotten. Because what if her brother was the one who wrote it? I wouldn't want him thinking I'd gone blabbing about it to everyone I knew. A love letter is a very private thing.

But still, you would think she'd be able to see it from my perspective.

“Don't you understand?” I rasped. “What is the point of me liking anybody, when it's entirely possible that my dad has arranged a marriage for me with some prince I've never met? Some guy who lives in like Dubai, or somewhere, and who gazes daily at my picture and longs for the day when he can finally make me his own?”

Lilly said she thought I'd been reading too many of my friend Tina Hakim Baba's teen romances.

“Seriously, Lilly,” I said. “I have to guard diligently against falling in love with somebody like David Hasselhoff or your brother, because in the end I might have to marry Prince William.”

Lilly got up off my bed and stomped out into the loft's living room. Only my dad was around, because I had finally forced my mom to go to her studio and finish up some paintings for her show. She wouldn't go until I promised her that I would beep her if my temperature went up over ninety-nine point eight.

“Mr. Renaldo,” I heard Lilly say, as she went out into the living room. She calls my dad Mr. Renaldo even though she knows perfectly well he is the crowned prince of Genovia. She doesn't care though, because she says this is America and she isn't calling anybody Your Highness. She is fundamentally opposed to monarchies--and principalities, like Genovia, fall under that heading. Lilly believes that sovereignty rests with the people. In Colonial times, she'd probably have been branded a Whig.

“Mr. Renaldo,” I heard her ask my dad. “Is Mia secretly betrothed to some prince somewhere?” My dad lowered his newspaper. I could hear it crinkling all the way from my bedroom. “Good

God, no,” he said.

“Moron,” she said to me, when she came stomping back into my room. “And while I can see why you might want to guard diligently against falling in love with David Hasselhoff, who is, by the way, old enough to be your father, and hardly a hottie, what does my brother have to do with any of this?”

Too late, I realized what I’d said. Lilly has no idea how I feel about her brother Michael. Actually, I don’t really have any idea about how I feel about him either. Except that he looks extremely Casper Van Dien with his shirt off.

And he was so nice to me the night of the dance, after Josh Richter dogged me so hard. Michael stepped right in and asked me to dance. And not once, either, but a few times. Slow dances, too.

I want him to be the one who’d written that letter. I really, really do.

But I’m not about to mention this to his sister. Instead, I told her I think it unfair of her to

demand explanations for stuff I said under the influence of codeine cough syrup.

She just got that expression she gets sometimes when teachers ask a question and she knows the answer, only she wants to give someone else in the class a chance to answer for a change.

It can really be annoying sometimes, having a best friend with an IQ of 170. Sometimes I wonder why I hang out with her, and then I remember that I've been doing it since kindergarten.

Some habits are very hard to break.

Homework:

Algebra: problems 1-20, pg. 115

English: brief (one page only) family history

World Civ: two hundred word essay on the conflict between India and Pakistan

Gifted and Talented: Yeah, right

French: Chapitre huit

Biology: pituitary gland

Lilly Moscovitz and Mia Thermopolis's List of Fake Versus Real Breasts:

Lilly: Mia:

Britney Spears Fake Real

Jennifer Love Hewitt Fake Real

Winona Ryder Fake Real

Courtney Love Fake Fake

Jennie Garth Fake Real

Tori Spelling Fake Fake

Brandy Real Real

Neve Campbell Fake Real

Sarah Michelle Gellar Real Real

Christina Aguilera Fake Real

Lucy Lawless Real Real

Melissa Joan Hart Fake Real

Mariah Carey Fake Fake

Even later on Wednesday

After dinner I felt well enough to get out of bed, and so I did.

I checked my email. I was hoping there might be something from my mysterious ‘friend.’

And I certainly had a lot of messages. I guess I hadn’t checked my email in a while.

But all of it was from people I know. The Media hasn’t found out my email address yet. If they had, I’m sure there would have been tons of mail from people wanting me to sponsor them in the Olympics or pay for their dog’s hip replacement surgery. Ever since word got out about my newfound princess status, the administrative office at Albert Einstein High School has been inundated with letters for me. Thank God the newspapers hadn’t leaked my home address. We’d probably never even be able to get in through the front door. When people find out you’re worth three hundred million dollars, you get a lot of mail.

What nobody seems to realize is that the money’s not really mine. I don’t have access to the Genovian royal family’s checkbook. Yeah, my dad pays me a salary of one hundred dollars a day for doing my princessly duties, like going to Grandmere’s

for comportment lessons and stuff, but all of that money goes straight to my designated charity, Greenpeace, so that we can save the whales. I only get ten dollars a week in allowance, for Pete's sake, and that's hardly enough to go see a movie. Well, in Manhattan, anyway.

Tina Hakim Baba was one of the people who emailed me. She sent get-well wishes. So did Shameeka. Shameeka mentioned that she was trying to talk her father into letting her have a Halloween party, and that if she succeeded, would I come? I wrote back to say of course, if I wasn't too weak from coughing.

There was also a message from Michael. It was a get-well message, too, but it was animated, like a little film. It showed a cat that looked a lot like Fat Louie doing a little get-well dance. It was very cute. Michael signed it Love, Michael.

Not Sincerely.

Not Yours Truly.

Love.

I played it four times, but I still couldn't tell whether he was the one who'd sent me that letter. The letter, I noticed, never once mentioned the word 'love.' It said the sender liked me. And he signed it sincerely. But there was no love. Not a hint of love.

Maybe when Michael sent the letter on Monday, he only liked me, but now, on Wednesday, he'd had enough time to figure out he loved me.

Hey, you never know.

Then I saw a message from a sender whose name I didn't recognize. Oh my God! Could it be my anonymous liker? My fingers were trembling on my mouse....

And then I opened it and saw, much to my astonishment, that it was from Grandmere!

Someone had shown Grandmere how to use a computer! She was emailing me from Baden-Baden! In French!

This put something of a damper on my elation over Michael's message.

Cher Amelia, Grandmere wrote. She is the only

person I know who still insists on calling me Amelia. Well, except for Lana Weinberger.

I hope you are enjoying this brief reprieve in your princess lessons. I understand that you have been ill. Please remember that a princess does not use poor health as an excuse to shirk her duties to her people.

That's easy for her to say. She should try doing her duties with an average temperature of 99.1.

I will return to the States on Friday, she wrote, with a very nice surprise for you.

Affectionately, Grandmere

Friday? It's Wednesday already.

Which means Grandmere's coming back day after tomorrow!

It seems like she only just left. Time sure goes by fast when Grandmere's not around.

I wonder what her surprise for me is. Knowing Grandmere, it's probably something totally horrible, like a coat made out of the skin of baby poodles.

Hey, I wouldn't put it past her.

ENGLISH JOURNAL

My Family History:

The ancestry of my family on my father's side can be traced back to 568 AD.

That is the year when a Visigothic warlord named Alboin, who appeared to be suffering from what today would be called an authoritarian personality disorder, killed the king of Italy and all these other people, then made himself king. And after he made himself king, he decided to marry Rosagunde, the daughter of one of the old king's generals.

Only Rosagunde didn't much like Alboin after he made her drink wine out of her dead dad's skull, and so she got him back the night of their wedding, by strangling him with her braids while he slept.

With Albion dead, the old king of Italy's son took over. He was so grateful to

Rosagunde that he made her princess of an area that is today known as the country

of Genovia. According to the only existing records of that time, Rosagunde was a kind and thoughtful ruler. She is my great grandmother times about sixty. She is one of the primary reasons why today Genovia has some

of the best literacy, infant mortality, and employment rates in all of Europe: Rosagunde implemented a highly sophisticated (for its time) system of governmental checks and balances, and did away entirely with the death penalty.

On my mom's side of the family, the Thermopolises were goat herders on the island of Crete until the year 1904, when Dionysius Thermopolis, my mom's great-grandfather, couldn't take it anymore, and ran away to America. He eventually settled in Versailles, Indiana, where he opened an appliance store. His offspring have been running the Handy Dandy Hardware store on the Versailles, Indiana, courthouse square ever since, but my mom says her upbringing would have been

much less oppressive, not to mention more liberal, back in Crete.

Thursday, October 22, Algebra

I decided I felt well enough to go to school today--also that I couldn't stay in bed another minute, wondering who'd sent me that letter--so against my mother's protests, I got up and got dressed and ordered the limo and called Lilly and told her to wait for us to pick her up in front of her building. When we got there, she had Michael with her. By the way he said hello to me, you would hardly have known that he'd ever sent me a get-well email signed Love, Michael. Or that on Saturday night we had had not one, but several slow dances together. Or that he had shown me what it is that he does when he is locked in his room all the time, which is compose actual songs, something he has told no other living person in the entire universe, so far as I know.

So was it really so wrong of me to expect a little more than just "Hi, glad you're feeling better?"

But I guess maybe I'm not the Josiest girl he's ever

met. Apparently, he isn't the author of that letter. And that Love at the end of his email was just a platonic Love. I mean, Michael's Love obviously didn't mean he actually loves me.

Not that I ever thought he did. Or might. Love me, I mean. A guy like Michael would so totally never even ask someone like me out, much less fall deeply and passionately into love with me. I mean, I'm his kid sister's best friend, that's all. He has to be nice to me, or Lilly will tell everyone in school how she once caught him getting teary-eyed over an old 7th Heaven re-run.

Besides which, I'm just a lowly freshman. Michael Moscovitz is a senior and has the best grade point average in the whole school (after Lilly) and is co-valedictorian of his class, along with Josh Richter. Michael could go out with any girl at Albert Einstein High School that he wanted to.

Well, except for the cheerleaders. They only date jocks.

Not that Michael isn't athletic. I mean, he doesn't believe in organized sports, but he has excellent quadriceps. All his ceps are nice, actually. I noticed last time he came into Lilly's room to yell at us for screaming obscenities too loudly during a Christina Aguilera video, and he didn't happen to be wearing a shirt.

So there is no way Michael Moscovitz would ever have sent me that letter, much less ask me out. **NO WAY.**

He did walk me to my locker, though. This was extremely nice of him, considering it was my first morning back in school after that whole embarrassing Josh Richter thing. Boris Pelkowski meets Lilly at the front doors to the school and walks her to her locker every single morning, and has done ever since the day she agreed to go with him to the Cultural Diversity Dance.

Okay, I admit that Boris Pelkowski is a mouth-breather who continues to tuck his sweaters into his pants despite my frequent hints that in America, this is considered a Glamour Don't. But still, he

is a boy. And it is always cool to have a boy--even one who wears a bionater--walk you to your locker every morning. I know I have Lars, but it's different having your bodyguard walk you to your locker, as opposed to an actual boy.

Except that I think the only reason Michael walked me to my locker this morning is because he was swept up in the general tide of people who came surging forward to greet me when I walked into school. Not reporters, or anything. Principal Gupta won't allow them on school property, and besides, their interest in me has waned somewhat since I've proven to be weak and sickly (and haven't been going anywhere or doing anything lately.) I only saw one photographer on our way in, and he had his telephoto lens pointed at some of the older girls who were straddling the big lion statue outside the school. Since we have to wear uniforms, and the girls' uniform is made up of a skirt and blouse and sweater, I sort of got the feeling that that

photographer was trying to get shots of those girls' underwear. I thought about telling them, but I also got the feeling that they sort of knew already. No, the people who started swarming around us when we walked into the school were all my girlfriends--Tina Hakim Baba, Shameeka Taylor, Ling Su, and Boris Pelkowski (he's not a girl, but he might as well be). They all started jumping around, asking me if I felt better, and telling me the gossip that had happened in the school while I was sick, like how some boys threw one of the new iMacs from the computer lab out the window to protest the school's unilateral insistence on using Microsoft products, and how somebody spray-painted End the Fascist Regime of Jocks across the school's delivery entrance (Lilly swears it wasn't her).

When all the screaming started, Lars and Tina Hakim Baba's bodyguard, Waheem--Tina has a bodyguard because her father is a sheik who fears that she will be kidnaped by executives from a rival

oil company--looked nervous, but then they realized it was just us being happy to see one another, and they put their Glocks away. Then the whole herd of us headed for my locker, forming a wall of solidarity against which not even a guy like Josh Richter, who thinks he is God's gift to women, could penetrate.

And anyway, by the time we got there, Josh was just leaving, his arm slung around Lana Weinberger's neck. He didn't so much as glance in my direction. So the whole thing was sort of a letdown anyway. Uh-oh, Mr. Gianini just called on me. I have no idea what we're discussing today. I swear, you get sick for one week, and it's like we've already moved on to trigonometry, or something.

The 3rd power of x is called cube of x

The 2nd power of x is squared

Ode to the View from the Window in My Algebra Class

Sun-warmed concrete benches

next to tables with built-in checkerboards

and the graffiti left by hundreds
before us in
Day-Glo spray paint:
Joanne Loves Richie
Punx Rule
Nuke Fags and Lesbos

And
Amber Is A Slut.
The dead leaves and plastic bags scatter
in the breeze from the park
and men in business suits try to keep the
last few remaining strands of hair covering
their pink bald spots.
Cigarette packets and used-up chewing gum
coat the grey sidewalk.
And I think
What does it matter
that it is not a linear equation if any variable is
raised to a power?
We're all just going to die anyway.

Thursday, Gifted and Talented

It turns out that since I've been gone, Boris has started learning some new music on his violin. Right now he is playing a concerto by someone named Bartok. And let me tell you, that's exactly how it sounds. Even though we locked him and his violin into the supply closet, it isn't doing any good. You can't even hear yourself think. Michael had to go to the nurse's office for aspirin.

But before he left, I tried to steer the conversation in the direction of mail. You know, casually, and all. We can talk all we want in Gifted and Talented, because Mrs. Hill, who is supposed to supervise us while we are engaged in our various gifted and talented projects--mine is not flunking Algebra; Michael's is designing his webzine, CrackHead; Lilly's is working on her public access television show, Lilly Tells It Like It Is.

Anyway, Lilly was talking about her show, and I asked her if she's still getting a lot of fan mail--one

of her biggest fans, her stalker Norman, sends her free stuff all the time, with the understanding that he wants her to show her bare feet on the air: Norman is a foot fetishist.

Then I mentioned that I'd received some intriguing mail lately....

And I looked at Michael real fast, to see how he responded.

But he didn't even glance up from his laptop!

I give up. It's clear Michael is not going to admit to writing that letter.

So why did he bother writing it at all????

To cover my embarrassment over this blatant dis, I asked Lilly what this week's show is about, since I'd missed out on all the filming last week due to the fact that we weren't speaking to each other.

Lilly said she isn't doing a show this week, because on Saturday, the day we typically film, she'd been getting ready for the big Cultural Diversity Dance.

Instead, she is going to show a re-run, the one

where we go to her stalker's place of work (he owns a photocopy store on East 20th). In this particular show, we were wearing sandals when we stopped by, and Norman made an accidental velox of his hand because he couldn't stop looking at our feet. It is truly a classic episode of Lilly Tells It Like It Is, one that ought to reign in the annals of public access television merely for Lilly's illuminating treatise on Christina Aguilera and her lack of a soul.

I for one will tune in just for that.

Michael is back from the nurse's office. She wouldn't give him any aspirin because it is a violation of the school drug code. So I gave him some of my codeine cough syrup. He says it cleared his headache right up. But that might also have been because Boris knocked over a can of paint thinner and we had to let him out of the supply closet. He was hyperventilating too hard to continue playing.

Here is what I have to do:

1. Stop thinking so much about that letter
2. Ditto Michael Moscovitz

3. Stop lying
4. Have more self-confidence
5. Stop hating Grandmere
6. Stop biting off fake fingernails
7. Stop watching so much television; do something for the environment instead
8. Pay more attention in Algebra
9. Cut down on between meal snacking
10. Wash PE shorts

Later on Thursday

Talk about unfair! Principal Gupta found out somehow (one guess: her initials are LW) about my giving Michael some of my codeine cough syrup, and I got called out of Bio and sent to her office to discuss my trafficking of controlled substances on school grounds!

Hello, what about all the kids who stand outside and smoke? Do they get in trouble for bumming cigarettes off one another?

And what about the cheerleaders and their Dexatrim?

There is absolutely no justice in this school. Principal Gupta took my codeine cough syrup away and told me I could have it back after school. She also told me not to bring it to school tomorrow. I said, What if I am hacking up a lung, like I did in Homeroom today? And she said if I am still that sick, I have no business being in school. Hello? If I don't come to school, how am I supposed to have any sort of social life whatsoever? Thank God my Bio partner took notes for me while I was gone. I would never be able to keep up with the human circulatory system if it weren't for Kenny Showalter.

Homework:

Algebra: problems on pg. 129

English: describe an experience that moved you profoundly

World Civ: two hundred words on the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan

Gifted and Talented: Please

French: devoirs--les notes grammaticals: 141-143

Biology: central nervous system

Even later on Thursday

What am I supposed to do about this stupid English journal? Describe an experience that moved you profoundly. I am so sure. What do I write about? The time I walked into the kitchen and found my Algebra teacher standing there in his underwear? That didn't move me, exactly, but it was certainly an experience.

Or should I talk about the time my dad spilled his guts out about how it turns out I am the heir to the throne of the principality of Genovia? That was an experience, although I don't know if it was profound, and even though I was crying, I don't think it was because I was moved. I was just mad nobody had told me before. I mean, I guess I can understand that it might be embarrassing for him to have to admit to his people that he had a child out of wedlock, but to hide that fact for fourteen years? Talk about denial.

What else profound has ever happened to me?

Should I talk about how I got this anonymous love letter and I couldn't get the guy who wrote it to admit to it? Yeah. That's profound, all right. I am beginning to realize that the only thing profound about my life so far is its complete and utter lack of profundity.

Don't forget:

Stop thinking about M.M.

English journal!

cat food

Q-tips

toothpaste

TOILET PAPER!!!

Monday, October 20th, 8AM

Okay.

I was in the kitchen eating cereal when my mom came out of the bathroom with this funny look on her face. I mean, she was all pale and her hair was kind of sticking out and she had on her terry cloth robe instead of her kimono, which usually means

she's pre-menstrual. So I was all, "Mom, you want some Midol? Because no offense, but you look like you could use some."

Which is sort of a dangerous thing to say to a premenstrual woman, but you know, she's my mom, and all.

Anyway, she just went, "Um. No, thank you."

So then I assumed something really horrible had happened, like Fat Louie had eaten another sock, or they were cutting off our electricity again because I'd forgotten to pay the bill. So I grabbed her and I was like, "Mom? Mom, what's wrong?"

She sort of shook her head in this confused way, but didn't say anything. So then I was all, "Mom, what is it?" I had a horrible thought, more horrible than Fat Louie eating another sock. "Mom, did Mr. G dump you or something?"

I tell you, I was ready to kick his butt, if I had to. But then my mom goes, in this dazed, happy way, "Mia. I'm pregnant."