



Princess

in waiting



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MEG CABOT

“If I was a princess,” she murmured, “I could scatter largess to the populace. But even if I am only a pretend princess, I can invent little things to do for people. Things like this. She was as happy as if it was largess. I’ll pretend that to do things for people is scattering largess.”

A Little Princess

by France Hodgson Burnett

Tuesday, January 6, Royal Quarters of the Dowager Princess

Grand’Mère is yelling at me again.

As if I don’t totally get why everybody is so mad about the whole speech thing. I mean, I have already sworn I will never again veer from the prepared script while addressing the Genovian populace.

But why am I the only one in this country who thinks pollution is an important issue? If people are going to dock their yachts in the Genovian harbor, they really ought to pay attention to what they are throwing overboard. I mean, porpoises and sea turtles get their noses stuck in those plastic

six-pack holders all the time, and then they starve to death because they can't open their mouths to eat. All people have to do is snip the loops before they throw the holders out, and everything would be fine.

Well, all right, not everything, since you shouldn't be throwing trash overboard in the first place. That is why my dad fully had all those Grecian urn-shaped trash receptacles placed at convenient intervals all along the pier. You would think people would consider actually using them. I mean, the ocean is not their garbage can.

I cannot stand idly by while helpless sea creatures are being abused by trendy Bain de Soleil-addicts in search of that perfect St. Tropez tan.

Besides, if I am to be the ruler of Genovia someday, people need to realize I am not going to be merely a figurehead, like some royals I could mention. I intend to tackle serious issues during my reign, such as plastic six-pack holders in the bay, and the fact that all the foot traffic from the

day-trippers coming off the cruise ships that dock out in the Genovian harbor is destroying some of our most historically important bridges, such as the Pont des Vierges (Bridge of the Virgins), so named after my great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmother Agnes, who threw herself off it rather than become a nun like her father wanted her to be (she was all right: the royal navy fished her out and she ended up eloping with the ship captain, much to the consternation of the house of Renaldi).

You would think people--okay, Grand'Mère and my dad--would recognize that it is important for me to establish my voice as regent now. Mr. Gianini once told me that it is better to start off mean and get nicer as the semester goes by than start nice and have everybody think they can walk all over you.

Whatever. I wish I could call Michael, or even Lilly, but I can't because they are spending Winter Break at their grandmother's in Florida and I don't even know the number. They are not getting back until the day before I do! How I have survived this long, without my boyfriend and best friend to talk to, is a

mystery wrapped in an enigma.

I am fully starting to hate it here. Everybody at school was all, Oh you are so lucky, you get to spend Christmas in a castle being waited on hand and foot.

Well, let me tell you something: there is nothing so great about living in a castle. First of all, everything in it is really old. And yeah, it's not like it was built in 4AD or whenever it was my ancestress Princess Rosagunde first became princess or whatever. But it was still built in like the 1600s and let me tell you what they didn't have in the 1600s:

1. Cable
2. DSL
3. Toilets

Which is not to say there isn't a satellite dish, but hello, this is my dad's place, the only channels he has got programmed are like CNN, CNN Financial News, and the golf channel. Where is MTV 2, I ask you? Where is the Lifetime Movie Channel for Women?

Not that it matters because I am spending all my

time being run off my feet. It isn't as if I ever even get a free moment to pick up a remote and go, Ho hum, I wonder if there's a Tracy Gold movie on. No. I mean, even now I am supposed to be taking notes on Grand'Mère's lecture about the importance of sticking to the prepared script during televised public addresses. Like I didn't get it the first time she said it, or the nine hundredth time, or however many times it has been since Christmas Eve, when I supposedly ruined everything with my treatise on plastic six-pack holders.

But let's say I even did get a moment to myself, and I wanted to, you know, send an email to one of my friends, or perhaps even my BOYFRIEND. Well, not so simple, because guess what, castles built in the 1600s simply aren't wired for the world wide web. And yeah, the Palais de Genovia audio-visual squad is trying, but you still have like three feet of sand stone or whatever the palace is made out of to bore through before you can even start installing any cable. It is like trying to wire the Alamo.

Oh, yeah, and the toilets? Let me just tell you that

back in the 1600s, they didn't know so much about sewage. So now four hundred years later, if you put one square too much toilet paper in the bowl and try to flush, you create a mini indoor tsunami.

Plus the only person living here in the castle who is remotely close to my age is my cousin, Prince René, who spends inordinate amounts of time gazing at his own reflection in the back of his ceremonial sword. And technically he isn't even really my cousin anyway. Some ancestor of his was awarded a principality by the king of Italy way back in like 600 AD, same as great-great-and-so-on Grandma Rosagunde. Except that René's principality no longer exists, as it was absorbed into Italy three hundred years ago.

René doesn't seem to mind, though, because everyone still calls him His Highness Prince René, and he is extended every privilege of a member royal household, even though his palace now belongs to a famous shoe designer, who has turned it into a resort for wealthy Americans to come for

the weekend and make their own pasta and drink two-hundred-year old balsamic vinegar.

Still, just because René is four years older than me and a freshman at some French business school doesn't mean he has the right to patronize me. I mean, I believe gambling is morally wrong, and the fact that Prince René spends so many hours at the roulette wheel instead of utilizing his time in a more productive fashion--such as helping to promote the protection of the nesting grounds of the giant sea turtles who lay their eggs on the Genovian beaches--irks me.

So yes, I did mention this to him. It just seems to me that Prince René needs to realize there is more to life than racing around in his Alfa Romeo or swimming in the palace pool wearing nothing but one of those little black Speedos which are very stylish here in Europe (I asked my dad to please for the love of all that is holy stick to trunks, which, thankfully, he has).

And okay, René just laughed at me.

But at least I can rest easy knowing I have done everything I could to show one extremely self-absorbed prince the error of his profligate ways. So that's it. That is my life in Genovia. Basically all I want is to go home. I would not even mind having to start school early if it meant I could forgo this evening's dinner with the King and Queen of Liechtenstein. Who are totally nice people, but hello, it's Tuesday, I could totally be watching Buffy instead.

With my new boyfriend.

My new boyfriend with whom I have not even been able to have a date yet, because the very day after we finally confessed our secret passion to one another, we were cruelly torn apart and cast to opposite sides of the earth--I to my castle in Genovia, and he to his grandmother's condo in Boca Raton.

You know, it has been exactly nineteen days since we last spoke to one another. It is entirely possible that Michael has forgotten all about me by now. I know Michael is vastly superior to all

the other members of his species--boys, I mean. But everyone knows that boys are like dogs--their short term memory is completely nil. You tell them your favorite fictional character is Xena, Warrior Princess, and next thing you know, they are going on about how your favorite fictional character is Xica of Telemundo. Boys just don't know any better, on account of how their brains are too filled up with stuff about modems and Star Trek Voyager and Limp Bizkit and all.

Michael is no exception to this rule. Oh, I know he is co-valedictorian of his class, and got a perfect score on his SATs and was accepted early decision to one of the most prestigious universities in the country. But you know it took him about five million years even to admit he liked me. And that was only after I'd sent him all these anonymous love letters. Which turned out not to be so anonymous because he fully knew it was me the whole time thanks to all of my friends, including his little sister, having such exceptionally large mouths.

But whatever. I am just saying, nineteen days is a long time. How do I know Michael hasn't met some other girl? Some Floridian girl, with long, sun-streaked hair, and a tan, and breasts? Who has access to the Internet and isn't cooped in a palace with her crazy grandma and a homeless Speedo-wearing prince and a freakish hairless miniature poodle?

“Amelia!” Grand'Mère just shrieked at me. “Are you paying attention?”

Yeah, sure, Grand'Mère. I'm paying attention. You are only squandering what are supposed to be the best days of my life, and probably because of you right now my boyfriend is strolling down the beach with some girl named Sandy who can do long division in her head and knows how to ride a boogie board.

But yes, I am paying attention to your very boring lecture about maintaining regal poise at all times. “I swear I do not know what is wrong with you,” Grand'Mère said. “Your head has been in the clouds ever since we left New York. Even more

so than usual.” Then she narrowed her eyes at me—always a very scary thing, because Grand’Mère had black kohl tattooed all around her lids so that she could spend her mornings shaving off her eyebrows and drawing new ones on rather than messing around with mascara and eyeliner. “You are not thinking about that boy, are you?”

That boy is what Grand’Mère has started calling Michael, ever since I announced that he was my reason for living. Well, except for my cat, Fat Louie, of course.

“If you are speaking of Michael Moscovitz,” I said to her, in my most regal voice, “I most certainly am. He is never far from my thoughts, because he is my heart’s breath.”

Grand’Mère gave a very rude snort in response to this.

“Puppy love,” she said. “You’ll get over it soon enough.”

Um, I beg your pardon, Grand’Mère, but I so fully will not. I have loved Michael for approximately

eight years. That is more than half my life. A deep and abiding passion such as this cannot be dismissed as easily as that, nor can it be defined by your pedestrian grasp of human emotion.

I didn't say any of that out loud, though, on account of how Grand'Mère has those really long nails that she tends to "accidentally" stab people with.

Except that even though Michael really is my reason for living and my heart's breath, I don't think I'll be decorating my Algebra notebook with hearts and flowers and curlicue Mrs. Michael Moscovitzes, the way Lana Weinberger decorated hers (only with Mrs. Josh Richters, of course). Not only because doing stuff like that is completely lame and because I do not care to have my identity subjugated by taking my husband's name, but also because as consort to the regent of Genovia, Michael will of course have to take my name. Not Thermopolis. Renaldi. Michael Renaldi. That looks kind of nice, now that I think about it.

Thirteen more days until I see the lights of New

York and Michael's dark brown eyes again. Please God, let me live that long.

HRH Michael Renaldi

M. Renaldi, prince consort

Michael Moscovitz Renaldi of Genovia

Friday, January 9, 2AM, Royal Genovian Bedchamber

This just occurred to me:

When Michael said he loved me that night during the Non-Denominational Winter Dance, he might have meant love in the platonic sense. Not love in the tides of flaming passion sense. You know, like maybe he loves me like a friend.

Only you don't generally stick your tongue in your friend's mouth, do you?

Well, maybe here in Europe you might. But not in America, for God's sake.

Except Josh Richter used tongue that time he kissed me in front of the school, and he was certainly never in love with me!!!!!!!

This is very upsetting. Seriously. I realize it is the middle of the night and I should be at least trying

to sleep since tomorrow I have to go cut the ribbon at the new children's wing of the Prince Philippe Memorial Hospital.

But how can I sleep when my boyfriend--the first real boyfriend I have ever had, since my last boyfriend, Kenny, doesn't count, seeing as how I didn't actually like him back as more than just a friend--could be in Florida loving me as a friend and possibly at this very minute actually falling in love with some girl named Sandy?

Why am I so stupid? Why didn't I demand that Michael specify when he said he loved me? Why didn't I go, "Love me how? Like a friend? Or like a life partner?"

I am so retarded.

And even if he managed to find the phone number of the palace somehow--and if anyone could, it would be Michael, since he once figured out a way to program his computer to auto-dial the 700 Club's toll-free donation hotline every two seconds, thus costing Pat Robertson a quarter of a million dollars

in a single weekend and causing him to yank the toll-free number off the air, which, in the world of computer hacking, is practically like winning a Nobel prize--I am sure the palace operator wouldn't even send the call through. Apparently I get something like seven hundred calls a day, none of which are from people I actually know. No, they're all from creepy pedophiles who would like to receive an autographed photo of me, or from girls who want to know what it was like when I met Prince William (he is a very cute guy and everything, but my heart fully belongs to another).

I am never going to be able to sleep now. I mean, how can I, knowing that the man I love could conceivably think of me only as friend he likes to French kiss?

There is just one thing I can do: I have to call the only person I know who might be able to help me. And it is okay to call her because:

- 1) it is only six o'clock where she is, and
- 2) she got her own cell phone for Christmas, so even though right now she is skiing in Aspen, I

can still reach her, even if she is on a ski lift or whatever.

Thank God I have my own phone in my room. Even if I do have to dial nine to get a line outside of the palace.

Friday, January 9, 3AM, Royal Genovian Bedchamber

Tina answered on the very first ring! She totally wasn't on a ski lift. She sprained her ankle on a slope yesterday. Oh, thank you, God, for causing Tina to sprain her ankle, so that she could be there for me in my hour of need.

And it is okay because she says it only hurts when she moves.

Tina was in her room at the ski lodge, watching the Lifetime Movie Channel when I called (Co-Ed Call Girl, in which Tori Spelling portrays a young woman struggling to pay for her college education with money earned working as an escort--based on a true story).

At first it was very difficult to get Tina to focus on the situation at hand. All she wanted to know about

was what Prince William was like. I tried to explain to her that beyond commenting that it was hot on the Cote d'Azur for December, Prince William and I hardly spoke to one another, I because my heart of course belongs to another, and he because apparently he found my treatise on the plight of the giant sea turtle less than scintillating.

This was extremely disappointing to Tina.

“The least you could have done,” she said, “was get his email address. I mean, even Britney Spears has that, and she’s not even royalty.”

Ever since she started going out with him, Tina’s boyfriend, David El-Farouq, has shied away from commitment, saying that a man can’t let himself get tied down before the age of sixteen. So even though Tina claims Dave is her Romeo in cargo pants, she has been keeping her eyes open for a nice boy willing to make a commitment. Although I think Prince William is too old for her. I suggested she try for Will’s little brother Harry who is actually very cute as well, but Tina said then she’d never get

to be queen, a sentiment I guess I can understand, although believe me, being royal loses a lot of its glamour once it actually happens to you.

“Look,” I said. “I’m sorry, okay? But I had other things on my mind. Like for instance that there is a distinct possibility that Michael only likes me as a friend.”

“What?” Tina was shocked. “But I thought you said he used the L word the night of the Non-Denominational Winter Dance!”

“He did,” I said. “Only he didn’t say he was in love with me. He just said he loved me.”

Fortunately I didn’t have to explain any further. Tina has read enough romance novels to know exactly what I was getting at.

“Guys don’t say the word love unless they mean it, Mia,” she said. “I know. Dave never uses it with me.” There was a throb of pain in her voice.

“Yes, I know,” I said, sympathetically. “But the question is, how did Michael mean it? I mean, Tina, I’ve heard him say he loves his dog. But he is not in love with his dog.”

“I guess I can see what you mean,” Tina said, though she sounded kind of doubtful. “So, what are you going to do?”

“That’s why I’m calling you!”

So then, just as I’d known she would, Tina came up with a plan. She was perfectly appalled when she found out Michael and I had not even spoken since the night of the Non-Denominational Winter Dance. I explained to her the whole phone situation, and she said, no problem, that I should call her back in five minutes. So I did. It was a really long five minutes, but I managed to keep from going crazy during it by pushing down all my cuticles with the tip of my scepter, which was lying around.

Pushing down your cuticles is not biting them, so I was still well within the confines of my New Year’s resolution.

When I called back precisely five minutes later, Tina had the number to Michael’s grandmother’s condo in Florida!

“How did you get it?” I asked her, in astonishment. “Easy,” Tina said. “I just called information, and asked for the number for every Moscovitz in Boca Raton, and then I called each one on the list until I got the right one. Lilly answered. She’s expecting your call.”

I couldn’t believe how nice this was of Tina. Also how stupid I was not to have thought of doing it myself.

“Now that you have the number,” Tina said, “how are you going to find out? Whether Michael is in love with you or not? I mean, you’re not just going to ask him, are you?”

“Well,” I said. “Yeah. That was the plan.”

“You can’t put him on the spot like that,” Tina said. “You’ve got to be more subtle. Remember, he’s Michael, which of course makes him vastly superior to most people, but he’s still a guy.”

I hadn’t thought of this. I hadn’t thought of a lot of things, apparently. I couldn’t believe that I had just been going along on this sea of bliss, happy just to know Michael even liked me, while the whole time,

he could have been falling in love with someone else.

“Well,” I said. “Maybe I should just be like, Do you like me as a friend, or do you like me as a girlfriend?”

“Mia,” Tina said. “I really do not think you should ask Michael point-blank like that. He might run away in fear, like a startled fawn. Boys have a tendency to do that, you know. They aren’t like us. They don’t like to talk about their feelings.”

It is just so sad that to get any kind of trustworthy advice about men, I have to call someone six thousand miles away. Thank God for Tina Hakim Baba, is all I have to say.

“So what do you think I should do?” I asked.

“Well, it’s going to be hard for you to do anything,” Tina said, “until you get back here. The only way to tell what a boy is feeling is to look into his eyes. You’ll never get anything out of him over the phone. Boys are no good at talking on the phone.” This was certainly true, if my ex-boyfriend Kenny

had been any sort of indication.

“I know,” Tina said, sounding like she’d just gotten a good idea. “Why don’t you ask Lilly?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I’d feel kind of funny about dragging her into something that’s between Michael and me--” The truth was, Lilly and I still hadn’t really even talked about me liking her brother, and her brother liking me back. I had always thought she’d be kind of mad about it. But then it turned out in the end she actually kind of helped us get together, by telling Michael I was the one who’d been sending him these anonymous love letters.

“Just ask her,” Tina said. “And then call me back! I want to know what she says.”

“Okay,” I said.

Then I hung up and looked at the number Tina had given me for Lilly and Michael’s grandmother’s condo. I have to admit that, as I dialed, my fingers were shaking. I mean, I was going to talk to Michael--Michael, my new boyfriend, whom I’d loved for years and years--for the first time since

we'd stood kissing outside the vestibule to my apartment building on Thompson Street. What was I going to say? I had no idea. The only thing I knew for sure was that I was not going to say Do you like me as a friend, or do you like me as a girlfriend? Because Tina had told me not to.

Lilly answered on the first ring. Our conversation went like this:

Lilly (sounding grouchy): It's about time. I thought you'd never call.

Me (sounding defensive): You never gave me your grandma's number.

Lilly: What, and you couldn't figure it out? I mean, you take off for Genovia, and you don't leave me a number where I can reach you--

Me: I didn't know the number. My dad always calls me. Besides, you didn't give me the number where you were going to be, either--

Lilly: You don't respond to my emails--

Me: There's no DSL here. Only dial-up, and it takes forever, and besides, I don't know how to access my account from Europe--

Lilly: I even called your mom, and she gave me the number, and the stupid palace operator wouldn't put me through! She said something about Prince William. Are you two going out now, or something?

Me (way surprised): Me and Prince William? NO! I barely said two words to him. Why? (starting to panic) Did the papers say I'm going out with him? Because I'm not. I'm totally not. Does Michael think I'm going out with him?

Lilly: How should I know? I'd have to talk to him.

Me: You two aren't talking? Why aren't you talking? Because he's going out with another girl? Is that it, Lilly? Michael met another girl, didn't he? Does she know how to boogie board? Oh, my God, I'm going to kill myself.

Lilly: What happens when people go to Europe, anyway? Do they suddenly become retarded, or something?

Me: Just tell me the truth, Lilly, I can take it. Has Michael found another girl? Is her name Tiffany? All girls from warm states are named Tiffany.

Lilly: First of all, for Michael to have met another

girl, that would mean he'd have to tear himself from his laptop and leave the condo, which he hasn't done once the entire time we have been here. He is as pasty-skinned as ever. Secondly, he is not going to go out with some girl named Tiffany, because he likes you.

Me (practically crying with relief): Really, Lilly? You swear? You aren't just lying to make me feel better?

Lilly: No, I'm not. Though I don't know why I should be so nice to you, since you didn't even remember his birthday.

I felt something clutch at my throat.

"His birthday?" I shrieked. "Oh my God, Lilly, I completely forgot!"

"Yes," Lilly said. "You did. But don't worry. I'm pretty sure he didn't expect a card or anything. I mean, you're off being the Princess of Genovia. How can you be expected to remember something as important as your boyfriend's birthday?"

This seemed really unfair to me. I mean, Michael and I have only been going out for twenty-two days, and for twenty-one of them, I had neither

seen nor spoken to him, not even once. Plus I have been busy. I mean, it is all very well for Lilly to joke, but I haven't seen her christening any battleships or campaigning amongst her populace for the rights of bottle-nosed dolphins. It may never have occurred to anyone, but this princess stuff is hard work.

“Lilly,” I said. “Can I talk to him, please? Michael, I mean?”

“I suppose,” Lilly said with a sigh, sounding very tired of me. Then she screamed, “Michael! Phone!” It was a long time after that that I finally heard some footsteps, and then Michael going to Lilly, “Thanks,” and Lilly going, “Whatever.” Then Michael picked up the phone and went, kind of curiously, since Lilly hadn't told him who it was, “Hello?”

Just hearing his voice made me forget all about how it was two in the morning and I was miserable and hating my life. Suddenly it was like it was two in the afternoon and I was lying on one of the beaches I

was working so hard to protect from erosion and pollution by tourists, with the warm sun pouring down on me and someone offering me an icy cold Orangina from a silver tray. That's how Michael's voice made me feel.

"Michael," I said. "It's me."

"Mia," he said, sounding genuinely happy to hear from me. I don't think it was my imagination, either. He really did sound pleased, and not like he was getting ready to dump me at all. "How are you?"

"I'm okay," I said. Then, to get it out as soon as possible, I went, "Listen, Michael, I can't believe I missed your birthday. I suck. I can't believe how much I suck. I am the most horrible person who ever walked the face of the planet. I should be in jail, like Winona Ryder."

Then Michael did a miraculous thing. He laughed. Laughed! Like missing his birthday was nothing! "Oh, that's all right," he said. "I know you're busy over there. And there's that time zone thing, and all. So. How is it? How did your speech go? The one on Genovian TV? Did your crown fall off? I know

you were afraid it might.”

I practically melted right there in the middle of my big fancy royal bed, with the phone clutched to my ear and everything. I couldn't believe he was being so nice to me, after the terrible thing I had done. It wasn't like twenty-two days had gone by at all. It was like we were still standing in front of my stoop, with the snow coming down and looking so white against Michael's dark hair and Lars getting mad in the vestibule because we wouldn't stop kissing and he was cold and wanted to go inside already.

I couldn't believe I had ever thought Michael might fall in love with some Floridian girl with boobs and a boogie board. I mean, I still wasn't exactly sure he was in love with me, or anything. But I was pretty sure he liked me.

And right there, at two in the morning, sitting by myself in my royal bedchamber in the Palais de Genovia, that was enough.

So I told him about my speech, and how I'd ruined it by going off about the plastic six-pack

holders, which Michael agreed with me was a vitally important issue. Then I told him about the sea turtles, and about my plan to organize teams of volunteers to patrol the beaches during nesting season to make sure that the eggs were not disturbed by tourists or the machines they bring in every morning to comb the sand and pick up all the seaweed that washed up during high tide.

And then I asked him about his birthday, and he told me how they'd gone to Red Lobster, and Lilly had an allergic reaction to her shrimp cocktail and they'd had to cut the meal short to go to Promptcare because she'd swelled up like Violet in Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, and now she has to carry a syringe filled with adrenaline around with her in case she accidentally ingests shellfish ever again, and how Michael's parents got him a new laptop for when he goes to college and how when he gets back to New York he is thinking about starting a band since he is having trouble finding sponsors for his webzine Crackhead on account of how he did that ground-breaking expos

on how much Windows sucks and how he only uses Linux now.

Apparently a lot of Crackhead's former subscribers are frightened of the wrath of Bill Gates and his minions.

I was so happy to be listening to Michael's voice that I didn't even notice what time it was or how sleepy I was getting until he went, "Hey, isn't it like three in the morning there?" which by that point it was. Only I didn't care because I was so happy just to be talking to him.

"Yes," I said, dreamily.

"Well, you'd better get to bed," Michael said.

"Unless you get to sleep in. But I bet you have stuff to do tomorrow, right?"

"Oh," I said, still all lost in rhapsody, which is what the sound of Michael's voice sends me into. "Just a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the hospital. And then lunch with the Genovian Historical Society. And then a tour of the Genovian zoo. And then dinner with Minister of Culture and his wife."

“Oh my God,” Michael said, sounding alarmed.

“Do you have to do that kind of stuff every day?”

“Uh-huh,” I said, wishing I was there with him, so that I could gaze into his adorably brown eyes while hearing his adorably deep voice, and thus know whether or not he loved me, since this was, according to Tina, the only way you could tell with boys.

“Mia,” he said, with some urgency. “You’d better get some sleep. You have a huge day ahead of you.”

“Okay,” I said, happily.

“I mean it, Mia,” he said. He can be so authoritative sometimes, just like the Beast in Beauty and the Beast, my favorite movie of all time. Or the way Patrick Swayze bossed Baby around in Dirty Dancing. So, so exciting. “Hang up the phone and go to bed.”

“You hang up first,” I said.

Sadly, he got less bossy after this. Instead, he started talking in this voice I had only ever heard him use once before, and that was on the stoop in front of my mom’s apartment building the night of the

Non-Denominational Winter Dance, when we did all that kissing.

Which was actually even more exhilarating than when he was bossing me around, to be truthful.

“No,” he said. “You hang up first.”

“No,” I said, thrilled to pieces. “You.”

“No,” he said. “You.”

“Both of you hang up,” Lilly said, very rudely, over the extension. “Grandma wants to order moo shu chicken for dinner.”

So we both said goodbye very hastily and hung up. But I’m almost positive Michael would have said I love you if Lilly hadn’t been on the line.