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MEG CABOT

SWEET SIXTEEN

Princess

A PRINCESS DIARIES BOOK

She could not be made rude and malicious by the rudeness and malice of those about her. “A princess must be polite,” she said to herself.

A Little Princess

Frances Hodgson Burnett

*Wednesday, April 28, 9PM, Albert Einstein High School
gymnasium*

“So Lana’s dad rented the Sultan of Brunei’s ten million dollar yacht for the night, and had Lana and her friends driven out into international waters so they could drink without getting in trouble.”

This is what Lilly just called to tell me.

“Lilly,” I whispered. “You know you aren’t supposed to call my on my cell phone. It is for emergency use only.”

“You don’t think this is an emergency? Mia, Lana’s dad renting the Sultan of Brunei’s yacht like that? That is a throw down. He is basically telling your grandmother to bring it.”

“I don’t have the slightest idea what you’re talking about.” Because I don’t. “And I have to go. I’m at a PTA meeting, for crying out loud.”

“Oh, God.” I can hear the soundtrack for *Altar Boyz* in the background. Ever since Lilly started going out with J. P. Reynolds-Abernathy the Fourth, she has gotten way into soundtracks from musicals, because J.P.’s dad is a theater producer, and J.P. can get free tickets to any show on Broadway he wants, and all of the off Broadway ones, too. And even the off-off Broadway ones. “I forgot you had to go to that stupid thing. Sorry I’m not there with you. But...well, you know.”

I did know. Lilly was serving the last week of a grounding her parents instituted after she was brought home by the NYPD for attacking Andy Milonakis--this kid from downtown whose cable access television show was picked up by MTV--with a Dojo’s side salad. Lilly believes Andy getting a studio deal instead of her is a travesty of justice, because her own show, *Lilly Tells It Like Is*, is so much better (in her opinion), as it isn’t simply

entertaining, but also highlights facts she feels her viewers ought to be aware of, such as the fact that the US's decision to withhold \$34 million from the United Nations Population Fund will lead to two million unwanted pregnancies, 800,000 induced abortions, 4,700 maternal deaths, and 77,000 infant and child deaths worldwide.

Whereas a typical episode of Andy's show features him holding a jar of peanut butter in one hand, and a jar of salsa in another, then making the jars dance with each other.

Lilly is also peeved that Andy is deceiving the American public by allowing them to think he is just a kid, when we both saw him coming out of d.b.a., which is a bar in the East Village that cards. So how did he get in there if he isn't at least twenty-one?

This is what she asked him when she saw him eating a falafel at Dojo's Health Restaurant on St Mark's Place, and why she claims she was forced to hurl her side salad at him, drenching him in tahini dressing, and causing him to call the cops on her.

Thankfully the Drs. Moscovitz talked Andy's legal team out of pressing charges, explaining that Lilly has been experiencing some anger issues since their recent separation.

But that didn't stop them from grounding her.

"So how's the meeting going?" Lilly asked. "Have they gotten to the you-know-what part yet?"

"I wouldn't know, because I'm too distracted, talking to YOU," I whispered. I had to whisper, because I was sitting in a folding chair in the middle of a row of very uptight looking parents. Being New Yorkers, they were all of course very well dressed, with Prada accessories. But being New Yorkers, they were also all angry about the fact that someone was using a cell phone while someone else—namely, Principal Gupta—was up at the podium, speaking. Also, of course, that Principal Gupta was basically saying she couldn't guarantee that their kids would get into Yale or Harvard, which was making them madder than anything. At \$20,000 a year—which is how much tuition at AEHS costs--New York parents expect some

return for their investment.

“Well, I’ll let you go now, so you can get back to work,” Lilly said. “But just FYI: Lana’s dad had her flown in to the yacht on the Sultan’s helicopter, so she could make a spectacular entrance.”

“I hope one of the blades cut her head off as she was getting out of it because she forgot to duck,” I whispered, avoiding the gaze of the lady in front of me, who had turned in her seat to give me a dirty look for talking while Principal Gupta was giving everyone some very important information about the percentage of AEHS graduates who get into Ivy League colleges.

“Well,” Lilly said. “No, that didn’t happen. But I heard her Azzedine Alaia skirt flew up over her head and everyone saw that she was wearing a thong.”

“Goodbye, Lilly,” I said.

“I’m just telling you. Turning sixteen is a big deal. You only do it once. Don’t blow it by having one of your stupid loft parties with the Cheetos and Mr. G as a DJ.”

“Goodbye, Lilly.”

I hung up just as the lady in the seat in front of me turned around to hiss, “Would you please put away that--”

But she never got to finish, because Lars, who was sitting next to me, casually opened his suit jacket, revealing his sidearm. He was only reaching for a Listerine Pocket Pak, but the sight of his Glock 9 mm caused the lady’s eyes to widen. She closed her mouth and turned back around in her seat very quickly.

Having an armed bodyguard follow you around everywhere you go can be a total pain in the butt, particularly when it comes to finding private time with your boyfriend.

But there are moments, like that one, when it can actually rock.

Then Principal Gupta asked if there was any outstanding business, and I threw my arm into the air.

Principal Gupta saw me raise my hand. I know she did.

But she totally ignored me, and called on some freshman's mother who wanted to know why the school wasn't doing more to prepare students for the SATs.

She went on to ignore me until she'd answered everyone else's questions. I can't really say that this shows the kind of commitment to youth-oriented issues I'd like to see in my educators, but who am I to complain? Just the president of the student council, is all.

Which is why, after Principal Gupta finally called on me, I saw a lot of parents gathering their Gucci briefcases and Zabar's shopping bags and getting ready to leave. Because who wants to listen to the president of the student council?

"Um, hi," I said, uncomfortably aware of the number of gazes—even if they were only half-listening—on me. I may be a princess, and all, but I'm still not used to the whole public speaking thing, despite Grandmere's best efforts. "I've been asked by a number of AEHS students to address the Parent/Teacher Association on the issue of our

current physical education curriculum, specifically its emphasis on competitive sports. We feel that spending six weeks learning the finer points of volleyball is a waste of our time and our parents' money. We would prefer our physical education funds be spent on physical education that is just that—education about our physical well-being. We'd like the gymnasium to be converted to an actual fitness center, with weight-training equipment and stationary bikes for spin classes, as well as space for pilates and t'ai chi, and for our physical education instructor to act as both a personal trainer and health specialist who will work with each student individually to create a personal workout and health program targeted to their own specific health needs, whether it be weight loss, increase in muscle tone, stress reduction, or simply improved overall health. As you can see--" I pulled out a pile of paper I'd been keeping in my backpack, and began passing the sheets around. "—we've assessed the overall costs involved in implementing this kind of health program, and found that it is much more

cost efficient than our current physical education curriculum, if you take into account the staggering amount of money you'll be paying to your child's physicians for treatment of juvenile onset diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, and the many other dangerous health conditions caused by obesity.”

This information was not met with the kind of enthusiastic response we—meaning my fellow student council members, Lilly, Tina, Ling Su, and I--had been hoping for. Parents, I noted, tended to look heavenward, and Principal Gupta glanced at her watch.

“Thank you for this, Mia,” she said, holding up the copy of the cost breakdown I'd given her. “But I'm afraid what you're proposing would be far too cost prohibitive for us at this time--”

“But as you can see by our projections,” I said, desperately, “if you were to just take a small amount of money away from, say, the Intramural Athletics Fund--”

At this, suddenly everyone was paying attention.

“Not the lacrosse team!” one father in a

Burberry raincoat bellowed.

“Not soccer,” cried another, looking up from his Blackberry with a panicked expression on his face.

“Not cheerleading!” Mr. Taylor, Shameeka’s dad, gave me a dirty look that would have rivaled one of Grandmere’s.

“You see the problem, Mia?” Principal Gupta shook her head.

“But if each team just gave up a little--”

“I’m sorry, Mia,” Principal Gupta said. “I’m sure you worked very hard on this. But your track record where financial matters are concerned hasn’t exactly been the most stellar--” I couldn’t believe she’d be so heartless as to bring up the slight miscalculation that had caused me to bankrupt the student government several weeks earlier. Especially considering the fact that, with the help of my grandmother and her tireless work on behalf of the Genovian olive growers, I had more than replenished the empty coffers. “—and I haven’t heard any other complaints about our current

P.E. curriculum. I move that we conclude this meeting--”

“I second the motion,” cried Mrs. Hall, my Gifted and Talented teacher, in an obvious ploy to get home in time for *Dancing With the Stars*.

“This meeting of the Albert Einstein High School Parent Teacher Association is adjourned,” Principal Gupta said.

Then she and everybody else booked out of there like winged monkeys were on their tails.

I looked down at Lars, the only person left in the room, besides me.

““The first resistance to social change is to say it’s not necessary,”” he said, obviously quoting somebody.

“Sun Tzu?” I asked, since *The Art of War* is Lars’s favorite book.

“Gloria Steinem,” he confessed. “I was reading one of your mother’s magazines in the bathroom the other day.” Lars has apparently never heard of the phrase *Too Much Information*. “Let’s go home, Princess.”

And so we did.

Wednesday, April 28, 10PM, Limo ride home

How am I ever going to rule an entire country someday when I can't even get my high school to install a row of stationary bikes in the gym?

Wednesday, April 28, 10:30 PM, The Loft

At least I have the comforting words of my boyfriend to soothe my frazzled nerves when I get home after a long day of fighting for the rights of the unathletically inclined students of Albert Einstein High. Even if I hardly ever get to talk to him—except via Instant Messaging--because he's so busy with his college courses, and I'm so busy with geometry, princess lessons, student council, and keeping my baby brother from sticking his tongue in a light socket:

SkinnerBx: Do you realize it's only three days till

the big day?

FtLouie: What day would that be?

SkinnerBx: Your sweet sixteen!

FtLouie: Oh, right. I forgot. Sorry. Stupid school stuff is bumming me out.

SkinnerBx: Poor baby. So what do you want for your birthday?

FtLouie: Just you.

SkinnerBx: Are you serious???? Because that can totally be arranged. Doo Pak is going to be gone for the weekend on a Korean Student Association campout in the Catskills....

Yikes! All I meant was that I wanted a little time alone with him—something that seems to happen more and more rarely, now that he's opted for accelerated graduation, doing all of his course work in three years instead of four, and his parents splitting up, and all, so that he has to have dinner every Friday night with either his mom or dad, so that each of them feels like they're getting their fair share of Michael time.

And, being the supportive girlfriend that I am, I totally understand about his being there for his parents during this stressful time in their lives. Mr. Dr. Moscovitz doesn't seem to really like his new rental apartment on the Upper West Side very much, even though he lives just a New York Times-throw from Michael's dorm, and can drop by to visit him there any time he wants (and frequently does so—thank God he has to buzz Michael's room to be let up and can't just come strolling in, or there might have been some awkward moments), and there are plenty of other psychotherapists in the neighborhood for him to hang out with.

And Lilly says life with her mother is practically unbearable, since Mrs. Dr. Moscovitz has put them both on low carb diets, and banished bagels from the breakfast table entirely, and meets with her trainer like four times a week.

But what about MY share of Michael time? I mean, I am the girlfriend. Even if I am still not prepared to go as far as he might want to go, making-out-wise.

Which is actually a good thing, considering what Mr. Dr. Moscovitz could have walked in on, that one time.

FtLouie: I didn't mean that literally! I meant maybe we could have a nice dinner, just you and me.

SkinnerBx: Oh. Sure. But you can have that any time. I mean, what do you REALLY want?

What DO I really want? World peace, of course. An end to emissions of the greenhouse gases that are causing global warming. For the Drs. Moscovitz to get back together, so I can see my boyfriend on Friday nights again. To not to be a princess anymore. To have things go back to the way they used to be, when things were simpler... like that time we all went ice-skating at Rockefeller Center, and I bit my tongue—only without the tongue-biting part.

And the part where Michael was there with Judith Gershner and I was there with Kenny Showalter.

But you know. Aside from that.

But none of these is something Michael can actually get me. He has no control over world peace, global warming, his parents, or the fact that they close the skating rink at Rockefeller Center on April 1, so I've never been able to go ice-skating on my birthday. And he certainly has no control over the fact that I'm a princess. Unfortunately.

FtLouie: Seriously, Michael. Except for a nice dinner, I don't want anything.

SkinnerBx: Are you SURE? Because that's not what you said at Christmas.

What did I say I wanted at Christmas? I can't even remember now. I hope he's not thinking of getting me another Fiesta Giles action figure. Because now that Buffy's only on in reruns, it just makes me sad to look at her and her friends, on their little plastic stands in the cemetery on my dresser. In fact, I've been thinking of replacing them with a lavender plant since the smell of

lavender is supposed to be soothing, and I need all the soothing I can get.

Or a the Napoleon Dynamite Uncle Rico style Time Machine Modulus Mr. Gianini confiscated off a kid in his freshman Algebra class and gave to me. Whichever fits better.

Besides, Michael doesn't have time to be bidding on eBay. He needs to spend what little free time he has with me.

Okay, I have to put a kibosh on the gift thing. It's got to be really hard on Michael, figuring out what to get for a girl who can basically get anything she wants from her palace. He's just a poor, hard-working student. It's just not fair to him. Or any boy who might happen to be dating a princess.

FtLouie: I have an idea. Let's make a rule: from now on we can only give each other presents we've MADE.

SkinnerBx: Are you serious?

FtLouie: Serious as L. Ron Hubbard was that we're all descended from aliens.

SkinnerBx: Okay. You're on.

WomynRule: POG, are you online with my brother again?

Crud. It's Lilly.

FtLouie: Yes. What do you want?

WomynRule: Just to remind you that SHE FLEW IN ON A HELICOPTER.

FtLouie: I have flown into tons of things in a helicopter.

Although this is not strictly true. I have only been on a helicopter once, when there was an accident on the FDR and there was no other way to get to the private jet parked at Teterboro.

But I know what Lilly is getting at, and I'm trying to nip it in the bud.

Iluvromance: Mia, you HAVE to have a party.

You HAVE to. I know you're upset about what happened at your birthday party last year.

Oh, great! Now Tina's getting in on it, too?

FtLouie: Gang up on me, why don't you, everybody.

Iluvromance: Lilly PROMISES what happened last year at your party won't happen this year. We won't play Seven Minutes in Heaven. We are way more mature than that now.

WomynRule: And besides, I'm with J.P. now.

FtLouie: You were with Boris then. But it still happened.

WomynRule: But things with Boris were so boring. I mean, where could it go?

Iluvromance: Um. Ahem.

WomynRule: Sorry. I'm sure things with you and Boris are totally different.

Iluvromance: Dang straight.

WomynRule: But you know what I mean. Things with J.P. are still so....well. You know.

Did we ever. Because Lilly can talk of hardly

anything else. I had never seen her so besotted for a guy. I suppose because J.P. keeps her guessing as to what his real feelings for her are. It seems like all I ever hear from her these days—when she isn't going on about her hatred for Andy Milonakis—is Do you think he likes me? I mean, we go out, and stuff, and we kiss, but he doesn't say stuff, you know, about how he feels about me. Do you think that's weird? I mean, what kind of guy doesn't talk about his feelings? Well, okay, I know MOST guys don't talk about their feelings. But I mean, what guy who goes to AEHS doesn't want to talk about his feelings? Who isn't gay, I mean? As if I'm supposed to know.

Iluvromance: Has he still not said the L word, Lilly?

WomynRule: He hasn't even said the G word. As in, that I'm his girlfriend.

FtLouie: Have YOU said the L word to HIM? Or the B word?

WomynRule: Of COURSE not. We've only been

going out for a little over a month. I don't want to scare him off.

FtLouie: Faint heart never won fair lady.

WomynRule: Stop quoting Gilbert and Sullivan at me. I want him to say the L word first. Is that such a crime? WHY WON'T HE SAY IT????

Iluvromance: Well, you know J.P. has always been something of a loner. He probably just doesn't know how to act around girls.

WomynRule: Do you really think so?

FtLouie: Totally. Oh my God, you guys, check it out: J.P.'s like the Beast from Beauty and the Beast, you know, when Belle first comes to live in the palace, and the Beast is all mean to her? Because, just like the Beast was alone in his castle for all those years, J.P. sat by himself at a lunch table for a really long time, so maybe he isn't entirely sure how people are supposed to interact, because he hasn't had all that much experience with human interaction—JUST LIKE THE BEAST!!! So he may come off as gruff or nonemotional, when I'm sure the opposite is true—JUST LIKE THE

BEAST!!!!

WomynRule: Mia. I know Beauty and the Beast is your favorite musical, and all. But I think that's sort of stretching it.

Iluvromance: No, I think Mia is right. All J.P. needs is the right woman to unlock his heart--which up until now he has kept in a cold, hard shell for his own emotional protection--and he will be like an unstoppable volcano of passion.

WomynRule: In that case why hasn't he exploded already? Unless you're implying I'm not the right woman to unlock his heart.

Iluvromance: I'm not saying that! I'm just saying that it won't be easy.

FtLouie: Yeah. Like it wasn't easy for Belle to win the Beast's trust.

WomynRule: Whatever! It took her like two songs!

Iluvromance: Yeah, but real life isn't like a musical. Unfortunately.

FtLouie: Maybe if you said you loved him first, it would cause the first crack in his hard outer shell....

WomynRule: I AM NOT SAYING I LOVE HIM

FIRST!!!!

SkinnerBx: Mia? Are you still there?

My boyfriend! I had gotten so involved talking about Lilly's boyfriend, I totally forgot about my own!

FtLouie: Of course I am. Hang on a minute.

FtLouie: You guys, I have to go, but one last thing: I AM NOT HAVING A SWEET SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY PARTY AND THAT'S FINAL. GOT IT?

WomynRule: God, all right already. You don't have to shout.

Iluvromance: Mia, no one wants you to do anything you don't want to do. But your sweet sixteen IS a big deal...

FtLouie: NO PARTY.

WomynRule: Well, better make sure your grandma knows that, then.

FtLouie: Wait. What is THAT supposed to mean?

WomynRule: Nothing. I have to go now.

FtLouie: LILLY!!! ARE YOU AND GRANDMERE PLOTTING SOMETHING BEHIND MY BACK AGAIN????

WomynRule: Terminated

FtLouie: I'm going to kill her.

Iluvromance: She can't help it. You know how upset she's been since her parents' separation. Not to mention this Andy Milonakis thing. And the fact that J.P. won't admit his true feelings for her. Oops, I hear my mom calling. I have to go. Bye!

Iluvromance: Terminated.

Great. Just great.

FtLouie: Michael, do you know if your sister and my grandmother are planning something for my birthday? Like a surprise party?

SkinnerBx: Not that I'm aware of. Can you imagine what kind of party those two would come up with?

Actually, I can:

The kind of party I'd really, really hate.