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Now and Later's

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NOW AND LATER'S

I had just wrapped my toothbrush in Saran Wrap and was about to pack it in my pink suitcase when Mikey hurried in, carrying a brown paper bag. He dumped out the bag. Suckers, gum, Jolly Ranchers, and a pack of Now and Later's. "Want some candy, Anne?" he asked.

"No, thanks; you know that on Saturday nights I eat Now and Later's with Josie."


"Well, she is the most popular girl, and she's my best friend. So blech!" I stuck out my tongue.

Mikey flew his packs of gum around like airplanes while I double-checked my bag. Since first grade, Josie and I had done everything together, and every Saturday I'd slept over at her house. We would climb trees or play soccer, then at three o'clock walk to the 7-Eleven and buy M&M's and two packs of Now and Later's. One pack of Now and Later's was for walking back home: The other one was for late at night when we'd dump the M&M's on Josie's sheets, divide them by color, and eat them, one by one. Only after the M&M's were gone, could we eat the Now and Later's. It was a rule Josie made up, and we never broke it.

Mikey finished playing airplanes and decided to eat his gum. He'd shoved a whole package in his mouth when Mom honked the horn. I ran to the car and said, "Hi, Mom," as I climbed in.

We'd only gone a ways before she asked, "Do you know a girl named Lisa Newcomb?"

"Yeah, she's in my class."

"Well, are the kids...nice to her?"

"Yeah," I lied. "Why?"

"Last night at PTA her mother said she may take Lisa out of Hill because the kids pick on her. You don't pick on her, do you?"

"No, I like her, Mom. I really do."

"Who picks on her?"
"Well, sometimes Josie does." I looked out the window, feeling guilty for telling on my best friend.

"You tell that Josie to quit it—honestly, kids can be so mean sometimes."

"Okay, Mom." I was more than glad to pull into Josie's driveway. "I'll get a ride back tomorrow from Josie's mother, okay?"

It didn't take long to forget mom's order. I was soon sitting on the edge of the bed in Josie's parents' room, trying not to giggle while Josie dialed the number from the kitchen.

"Pick it up, Anne!" Josie's whisper sounded like a yell through the phone.

Lisa's mother answered after the third ring. Josie plugged her nose and said in her nasal voice, "I am a representative from the Little Bo Peep Soap Company. We're looking for a very ugly girl to be in our TV commercial. Now we heard your daughter, Lisa, is very ugly and..."

"Who is this?" Mrs. Newcomb demanded.

"This is the Little Bo Peep Soap Company, ma'am." Josie sounded serious.

"I'm going to call the cops, and don't..."

Josie slammed down the receiver. Mrs. Newcomb went on in my ear, "...think I won't. Lisa told me all about the way you kids treat her."

I sucked in my breath. Mrs. Newcomb listened to see if any one was still on the line, then hung up. I ran into the kitchen where Josie stood, all grin beneath her Tiger baseball cap.

"Boy! She was really mad," I gasped. "Do you think she'll call the cops?"

"No," Josie didn't worry about things like policemen. She sat down on the kitchen chair and drummed her fingers on the table. "Too bad Lisa didn't answer."

"Yeah..." Actually I didn't think Lisa was that bad, but I wouldn't dare say that to Josie. "Now who are we going to call?" I asked instead.

"Lisa," Josie said.

"Lisa? Why? We just called her."
"We're going to invite her over."

"Here? Really?" I thought that maybe we were going to let her sleep over. But Josie explained otherwise: "We're going to invite her over and beat her up."

"Beat her up? Why?"

"God, Anne, sometimes you can be so stupid; but I guess there's got to be some reason you got the pretty curls and freckles."

Josie had stringy brown hair that always hung from her Tiger cap. Sometimes I wished she would curl it or something, but I'd never dare tell her so.

"I hate my freckles," I said. "Why are we going to beat Lisa up?"

"Don't you understand anything? Then she started in. I'd heard her say it a hundred times before: "She cheated in the dance contest--Lisa cheated."

And I could feel my eyelids stretching into my eyebrows, just like the other times I'd wanted to say something, but didn't. "But, Josie, I won sometimes."

"Yes, but I never won, did I? And I always won before she came."

Josie had disliked Lisa from the day she'd transferred to Hill Grade School in December. She'd walked into Mrs. Carmichael's homeroom, wearing a red dress, her hair, piled in brown curls on top her head. Josie laughed and said, "Look at her hair. Little Miss Princess." Everybody laughed, everybody, that is, but Lisa whose face was as red as her dress.

During lunch that day, Josie held her weekly burping contest and was winning, as usual. Lisa said to me, "How gross." Everybody laughed. That got me really mad. Nobody could say anything mean about Josie to me. But Josie got even madder. After Lisa said Josie's burping was gross, nobody like her much. And besides, Lisa never wanted to do anything the rest of us did, like ice hockey or kick ball. Josie was always picked first for the teams, and during lunch, Lisa sat reading a book. Except, that is, when we had dance contests. One day the gym teacher said Lisa could be judge. Josie was angry. She wanted to judge because she couldn't dance. After wards she called Lisa the teacher's pet.

I'd been thinking so hard about the first days Lisa entered Hill that I'd forgotten what I was supposed to do now. Josie snapped, "Stop daydream-
ing, dummy. Call her."

I went to the phone and dialed Lisa's number. "Hi, Lisa--this is Anne."

"Oh, Anne--what are you doing?"

"Nothing. Do you want to come over to Josie's house? We have something to show you you."

"You and Josie want me to come over? I'll ask my mom!" She dropped the phone, then picked it back up two seconds later and said excitedly, "My mom said she'll bring me over."

"Okay. See you later."

"When will she get here?" Josie asked as I hung up.

"I forgot to ask."

"Great. You never do anything right."

"Yes, I do. I called her, didn't I?"

Josie rolled her eyes and smiled, "Let's go upstairs."

We marched up to Josie's small bedroom. The bed and dresser filled most of the room, and they were usually cluttered. I started looking for a reason not to pick on Lisa. "We can't beat her up. There's no room here."

"Oh, yes we can," Josie said, matter of factly. "We're going to beat her up on the bed."

"Well, then, let's beat her up with soccer boppers. They don't hurt much."

Josie thought about that for a while. "Okay, but that doesn't mean you punch soft."

"Oh, I know."

We blew up the plastic soccer boppers. I stuck my fist in the tunnel through the middle, and the cold plastic squeezes my fist. Josie punched me. I giggled and punched her back. We started rolling around on the floor. I tickled her feet, and Josie's laughter shook her whole body. We loved tickle fights. Finally Josie sat up with a sigh and smiled, "When do you want to get our candy?"
"Let's do it when Lisa gets here."

"No, let's go now."

"But she might come when we're gone."

"Too bad. She can't come to 7-Eleven with us. Sheesh! The next thing you'll want is for her to sleep over."

"Well?"

"Yuck! No way! She'd get her hairspray all over my pillows."

The knocking on the door interrupted our laughter. Lisa was leaning on the screen, looking inside. "Hi, Josie! Hi, Anne!" Her voice sounded high.

"Come on in," Josie said.

Lisa smiled at me. "What did you want to show me?" She took off her windbreaker and laid it on the stairs. "Look," she said, "I got new jeans."

"Wow, I thought you didn't like jeans," I answered.

"Well, um, Josie and you and everybody else wears them, so...

"Let's go upstairs," Josie cut in. We went single file up the stairs, Lisa in the middle. Lisa then looked around Josie's room and asked me again, "What did you want to show me?"

Josie kicked a dirty pair of socks under her bed.

"Uh...nothing really," I said. "We just thought maybe you'd like to come over."

Lisa smiled and sat down on the bed. "Okay." She looked around the room, then smiled at me. She looked at Josie, then smiled again, trying to think of something to say. "What...um," she looked at the floor, "what did you get on your math test?"

Josie's back stiffened, "I got 76 per cent."

"I got eighty-five," I said wishing right away that I had 74 per cent.

Lisa smiled, "I got 92 per cent."
"Well, it helps if you're teacher's pet!"

Lisa's smile dropped, "I'm not teacher's pet, Josie. She likes you just as much as she does me."

"Huh," Josie said and gave Lisa her "evil eye."

"Yes, she does, Josie" I said. "You just think she doesn't."

Josie rolled her eyes, then she smiled and said, "Let's play a game now."

"Okay," Lisa answered, her voice too high again.

"It's called 'Bouncy Boppers'. First, we get on the bed." Josie got on the bed. "Hand me the soccer boppers, Anne."

I gave her a pair, got a pair for myself, and climbed up. We stuck our fists into the plastic tunnels. Josie continued, "You jump around," she swung at me, "and try to hit each other."

We jumped around on the bed, laughing, trying to hit each other. "C'mon, Lisa," I yelled. "Come, jump."

Lisa looked reluctant, but she said okay and climbed on the bed. She put a soccer bopper on each hand and bounced just a little on the bed.

"C'mon," I laughed and jumped higher and higher till my head almost hit the ceiling. Then I landed next to Lisa and hopped around her, punching.

Lisa laughed, gave me a sock in the arm, and started jumping around. "Boy, I'm glad I wore my jeans," she smiled. She jumped up and landed right by Josie's feet.

Josie reached out and punched her. Lisa laughed and punched back. But Josie wasn't laughing, and she wasn't jumping high.

"Hey, Josie Posie," I teased.

"Josie Posie!" Lisa yelled, as she flew up and back down again--up and back down.

Josie came to a dead stop. "What did you call me?"

"Josie Posie," Lisa laughed.
Josie jumped again, once, then punched Lisa hard. Lisa was startled, but kept right on jumping. Josie punched her again in the shoulder, so Lisa swung to hit her, but missed. Because Josie laughed, Lisa laughed too. I moved to the head of the bed. Josie laughed again and punched Lisa with all her strength. Lisa fell down.

"Hey, be careful," Lisa half-whispered, half-whined on her knees.

"Oh--is Lisa going to mess up her pretty hair?" Josie taunted.


"Come help, Anne," she said.

Josie pinned one of Lisa's arms down and punched her all over.

"Let me up," Lisa cried.

"Punch her, Anne," Josie yelled.

I stood there, my soccer bopper hanging from my hand. Lisa, half off the bed, struggled to get out from under Josie's knee. Finally she rolled over and got to her feet. Then Josie hit her on the side of the head.

"Ouch," Lisa cried. She wasn't jumping.

"Play right, Lisa," Josie growled. When she pushed her, Lisa fell off the bed. Her butt landed first, right on an old container of chip dip. She hit her head on the wall, and her barette fell out, broken.

"My hair clip!" Lisa cried.

"Don't worry about a stupid barette!" Josie yelled. "You landed in my dip--you ruined it."

"But it's broken. I got it from my mother. And now it's ruined, and my new jeans are ruined, too." Lisa stood up, wiping the dip from her pants. She bit her lip, trying not to cry.

Josie was calm. "Well, I'm hungry. Come on, Anne. Let's eat."

I looked at Lisa, "Do you want to come?" She shook her head.

"I want some potato chips," Josie said to me as we walked down the stairs. I followed her into the kitchen. "That wasn't very nice." I said.
"What do you mean? It's what we wanted, wasn't it?"

I looked at the floor, sure Lisa was probably crying upstairs.

"I want some lemonade, do you?" Josie couldn't have been more cheerful.

"No, thanks."

"Well, I'm going to make some for myself." She climbed on the kitchen counter and got a pitcher and the mix out. "Get me a measuring cup and some sugar."

I looked at her and said, "No."

"What?"

"No."

She laughed, "What's the matter, Baby-boo? Do you feel sorry for that little princess and her new jeans? All I did was show her how everybody at Hill feels about her. Maybe she'll leave now." Josie climbed down and got out the sugar for her lemonade.

"But she's not so bad."

"C'mon, Anne, quit pretending you like her."

"I'm not pretending--she's not that bad!"

Lisa walked in, her face red and splotchy. "Can I use your phone?" she asked.

"Sure. It's around the corner." Josie pointed to the phone by the door, then filled the pitcher with water, stirred, poured lemonade in a glass, and drank it in one gulp. She smiled at me, and I tried to smile back.

Lisa hung up the phone. "My mom will be here in ten minutes. Can I wait in front?"

"I don't know... can you?" Josie laughed.

Lisa looked at Josie, then walked through the living room to pick up her coat. Josie poured herself another glass of lemonade, drank it all at once, then burped. She waited for me to laugh. I didn't.
"When do you want to go to 7-Eleven?" she asked.

"I, um... can't go."

"Why not?" She stopped pouring her third glass of lemonade.

"Well, my mom said I have to go to my grandpa's, and so I can't sleep over tonight."

"But you brought your suitcase."

"I know -- but we're going to Grandpa's."

But your mom knows you always stay the whole night. That's the rule!"

"She doesn't want me to any more."

Josie looked at me. "She doesn't?"

"No."

"Well, good then," she yelled. "I don't care if you stay here ever again, Anne Martin! See if I ever pick you for my kickball team."

I kept looking at the floor.

"You don't know what's good for you. We're going to have so much fun when that dumb, spoiled princess leaves! I'll win the dance contests, and when spring is really here, we'll play kickball everyday!"

"I gotta go," I said. "My mom will be mad."

I walked from the kitchen and picked up my stuff. I could hear Josie upstairs pounding away with the soccer boppers while I waited on the front steps for Lisa's mom to us a ride home.

Maura Troester