

WAG THE MOUTH
A NOVEL

by Lynne Thompson

CHAPTER 1

The most votes for an elected student body president in the history of Warren High School--at least that's what Mr. Summers, our principal, said. Many are attributing it to my act of genius.

Morgan is sitting across from me dressed to the nines, attempting to save face. I'll bet in a million years she never thought she'd be sitting across from Tori Sanchez. Normally geeks like me don't make the stage, but are destined to remain an unidentified pin size photo in the back pages of the yearbook. I guess you're wondering how did someone like me get nominated in the first place? Well it wasn't easy...but a lot can happen in one month.

But first, I'll need to bring you up to speed on the hierarchy of Geekdom. I know what you're thinking, aren't all of us alike? The answer is no, no and no. Although most people believe we are just one big socially dysfunctional group, lacking any coolness, the truth of the matter is that within geek culture there is a caste system that few people recognize.

Let's start with the largest group at the bottom of the food chain--the groadie geeks. Bad hygiene and social mistakes mark this bunch as total dweebs. No one will ever forget the day that Anthony showed up wearing his mother's sweater, or the time Beatrice decided to wear her pimple nose strip during P.E., swearing all along that it was an athletic breathing device. Even so, level three geeks are usually the kindest and the most devoted friends anyone could ask for.

In the middle are lifer geeks. These people can't help being nerdy; it's in their genes. Their parents are geeks and their parents were geeks. The whole family tree is literally devoid of any coolness. If it weren't for this group chess clubs would cease to exist and medical research would come to a screeching halt.

At the top of the pyramid are people like my closest friends, Brian Jeeters and Dot Anderson. Brian acquired two strikes against him as perpetual bed-head and online gaming nerd. Some weekends he's been known to spend 24 hours straight battling barbarians and saving princesses in the land of Camelot. Needless to say he drags himself to school on Mondays looking and smelling a bit like road kill. To make matters worse, he's been known to fall asleep in class and when called upon responds with, "Take that you rogue."

Dot, whose real name is Dorothy (never call her that) fell into the geek category purely by default. She is almost invisible. She hates attention, struggles to make eye contact and actually believes that all people are good regardless of their crime. I'm sure she thinks that had Darth Vader been exposed to a more nurturing environment he never would have succumbed to the 'dark side'.

Then there's me. I'm in a category all by myself. It can't be normal to spend oodles of time memorizing works by Lucy Maud Montgomery. But when I read passages like, "In a moment she was within his reach. He grasped her arms and pulled her up beside him into safety." I melt into romantic bliss.

As far as my wardrobe is concerned-forget the fashion police, they would need to send an entire SWAT team to apprehend the fashion blunders hanging in my closet. But I love my cozy clothes. They've proven themselves faithful season after season.

A social life? I'm not really sure I know what one is. Technically I could say that I go out every night, but then I'd have to fess up that I'm accompanied by a small, curly haired male, that has four feet and answers to the name of Roth.

I did attend a church ice cream social last week, but since my parents were also invited I hardly think it counts.

I'm also autodidactic, which means I've taught myself to do many strange things like: play the harmonica, build miniature doll furniture out of toothpicks, and compete in sport stacking (some call it cup stacking but it sounds kind of lame when you tell people that you compete with others to stack plastic cups).

Of course one of my strangest pastimes is collecting used up chewing gum, don't worry, I only save my own. You might be surprised to learn that so far I've built up a sphere that measures 6" in diameter. Someday I hope to find my name in the Guinness World Book of Records for largest ball of gum in the world.

As you can see I'm a tad different from the other kids in my high school. Aunt Suzie says I'm unique. Yeah right. We all know that unique is the code word for nerd. No, I could almost stomach geekiness if I was allowed to exist peacefully in my cocoon of eccentricity, but that could never happen. Morgan would never allow it. Which is why I'm here today. It's hard to believe it all started with chocolate milk.



"Hey cup girl did you post the cafeteria menu for next month's lunch?"

Morgan Winter's job as newspaper editor allotted her way more power than she deserved, especially considering her limited writing ability. (Morgan thinks a gerund is a pet). Her elevated status as editor of the school's newspaper *The Eagle*, made her both admired and feared. Getting on her bad side could land you a less than favorable review in the gossip column. Fortunately, Morgan has

yet to exercise her first amendment right, but always makes mention of it when someone gets in her way.

I finished typing the last entry m-y-s-t-e-r-y l-a-s-a-g-n-a. “Yes, it’s finished, but seriously Morgan, I’ve been on the staff for four months now. Don’t you think I’m ready for a more challenging assignment... like an article?”

Morgan forced herself into my chair almost knocking me to the floor. “Getting grandiose are we? You think you’re ready for something like that?”

Gee, I don’t know. In the past two years I’ve taken business composition, response to British literature, and aced advanced placement English. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Morgan turned from the monitor sizing me up top to toe. “I’ll think about it. Newspaper writing is serious stuff ya know.”

Right. I’m sure the whole world was greatly impacted by Morgan’s recent exposé on choosing the right kind of products for skin exfoliation. I retreated to my desk and pulled out a novel. That’s a book without pictures, something Morgan would never attempt.

“Hey Tori,” Morgan called out. “I know what kind of article you’d be good at.”

“Really!” I closed my book, ready for my first assignment. I knew she’d come to her senses.

“Yeah, I might need a fashion piece. I’ll call you if we decide to revisit the Homeless Shelter period.”

Sometimes it’s hard to believe that Morgan and I used to be friends. Things were sure different in seventh grade. I’ll never forget the time she selected me to be one of the chosen.

“Tori, you should try out for cheer, you’d be great, wouldn’t she Tiffany?” Morgan said to her B.F.F.

“Oh yes,” Tiffany agreed, “she’d be perfect.”

I was shocked and honored. “Me? Cheerleading?”

“Yeah, you’re a natural. You have lots of energy. Doesn’t she Tiffany?”

Tiffany giggled. “Lot’s and lots.”

I do have pep. It was nice someone finally noticed. “But I don’t know the routine.”

Morgan grinned. “Don’t worry, tryouts aren’t until Thursday, and practices start today after school. You’re smart, you’ll learn it in no time.”

Morgan and Tiffany giggled. I joined them. After all that is what cheerleaders do.

That day after school found me with a group of girls that I usually only saw from a distance. I thrilled at the thought of gaining entrance into the inner circle. Granted, the accumulated brain cell activity in the room wasn’t firing fast enough to light up a refrigerator bulb, but I was finally going to be somebody. At first I was surprised at how difficult the routines were.

Morgan giggled. “Come on, you can do it.”

Right then I decided I could do it. I was going to give cheer my best shot. I was the first one to show up for practices and the last to leave. By Wednesday I was looking pretty hot.

“Hey Morgan, she’s better than you,” one of the girls teased.

Coach Sue blew her whistle. “Tomorrow will be the big day, unfortunately only ten of you twelve girls will make the squad. Good luck.”

I couldn’t sleep that night. I was too excited. I dreamed the routine over and over again. The next day at tryouts I ran into Morgan and Tiffany. They jumped in front of me as I reached for the gymnasium door.

“What’s going on?” I asked.

Morgan shook a pom pom in my face. "What do you live in a cave or something? "Didn't you hear? Coach Sue is sick. The tryouts have been rescheduled for tomorrow."

"Bummer!" Well, at least I'd have another day to practice the routine.

The next day I showed up at school wearing the new kick pants my mother had bought me, and a school sweatshirt. I figured it couldn't hurt to "look" the part of cheerleader. I just knew I was going to make the team. As I sat in first period homeroom, the morning announcements came over the intercom. I was horrified when the principal started congratulating those selected for this year's cheer team. What!?

I stared at the faces around me. This can't be happening. "Wait," I yelled, "tryouts are today."

"...and finally, Morgan Winters," the principal said.

I looked over at Morgan in the back of the room. She and Tiffany were laughing hysterically.

I don't know how I made it through school that day. All I remember is throwing up in my flowerbed where the school bus let me off, and then sobbing into my pillow the rest of the weekend.

For years I tried to understand what I must have done to Morgan to make her hate me so much. Last year I finally gathered enough courage to apologize for anything I might have done in the past. She called me the most clueless geek she'd ever met.

It's taken me awhile to arrive at the party, but I've finally caught on. As far as Morgan is concerned my only crime is...being me. And since I can't seem to change that, my life will always be a series of unfortunate events.

This lack of fairness wouldn't be so difficult to tolerate if only students enforced this wretched system, but unfortunately, teachers fall prey to discriminating against us as well.

Take yesterday for example. It was KUT day, which stands for Klean Up the Trash. Yes, I know that clean is spelt with a c not a k. Perhaps this explains why my parents are so stressed out about the current education system.

Anyhow, KUT is the brainchild of janitors complaining that they don't have time to constantly pick up garbage left by lazy students...school cutbacks and all. So, every Friday a class is banished to the commons to forage for stuff that would make a crime scene investigator squeal. And this week in particular was the mother of all KUT's.

Every year Homecoming celebrations conclude with the cheerleading squad hosting the razzle-dazzle pie-throwing contest. This is where "lucky" students are chosen by lottery to receive a pie face greeting from members of the "it really is all about me" crowd. Everyone knows the unfortunate class assigned to KUT duty on that day is in for the clean up of their life. This alone is bad enough, but like the Energizer Bunny® the injustice just keeps on going.

It was ten minutes until KUT duty when the announcement came over the speaker. "All members of the cheer squad please report to the gym for a special meeting."

"Yahoo!" Morgan and Tiffany shouted, and bounced out of the room.

"Hold on," I said. "They make the mess and then we have to clean it up?"

Brian slumped down into his chair. "Yep, they play and we work, just another day in paradise."

"For them," Dot added.

"Okay class, everybody out for KUT duty," our teacher announced. The class moaned.

As I stomped outside with my fellow workers, pulling on my allocated latex gloves, I couldn't help whining. "At my home, if you make the mess, then you have clean it up."

Dot double gloved. "That sounds fair to me."

Brian walked past me bouncing his balloon glove into the air. "If life were fair then we'd be warned by email '*You've got Morgan*' and then have the option of hitting the delete button."

I took a turn at hitting the glove. "Obviously my antivirus protection isn't working."

The task before us proved as daunting as feared. The tables were covered with flies feasting on left over pies pieces that had soured in the hot sun. And the ground was littered with hollowed out pastry shells.

Brian caught his balloon and gasped. "Nasty."

Dot opened her garbage bag and bent down to retrieve an empty whipped cream can. "The cheerleaders must have forgotten to add 'cleaning'-up' to their schedule, because nothing looks picked up."

I scoffed. "Yah think?"

Brian picked up a pie tin and flung it. "Hey, these go pretty far, maybe we should collect them for Frisbees."

Ugh! Disgusting," I screamed. "I just lost my flip flop in that pile of goo."

"I got it," Brian said. He retrieved the shoe and then bent down to place it on my foot. Our eyes met and he fell backward landing into a pie. Dot and I couldn't help but crack up.

I reached my hand down to help him up. "Are you okay?"

Brian stood and removed the chocolate filled tin stuck to his backside. "Anybody for black bottom pie?"

Then there's the issue of cafeteria injustice.

“Could it be a coincidence that all popular people receive chocolate milk, whereas the rest of us get regular milk?” I wailed one day at lunch.

Brian slid in next to Dot. “You’re just being paranoid, besides, I got chocolate milk yesterday.”

Dot broke open her straw. “I didn’t.”

“Brian, you got out of class early yesterday, remember? Since you were the first one in line there was no way for them to execute the stashing of the milk,” I explained.

Brian raised his eyebrow. “The stashing of the milk?”

“Yes, to keep them back for when the popular people come into line.”

Brian rolled his eyes. “Did your mom over-medicate you today?”

“Oops!” Dot scrambled to retrieve her spilled milk carton. We all grabbed our napkins and began sopping.

“I’m right about this Brian Jeeters and I’ll prove it.”

Brian stopped wiping. “That I’d like to see.”

“Fine,” I’ll conduct a little experiment. Tomorrow I’ll get in line in front of a totally popular person and see if we both get chocolate milk or not.”

Dot gathered up all the wet napkins. “Like who?”

I unpacked my dessert. “How about Tanner Holts?”

Dot tossed the dripping wad into the trash next to her. “He’s popular alright, and handsome.”

Tanner was captain of the football team, vice-president of the Ski Club, and head photographer for *The Eagle*. But what made him most popular were his dreamy eyes and perfect smile. If cuteness were against the law, he’d be locked up for life. Even though we had class together we had never spoken. I mean, why would he speak to me? I’m pretty much in the nobody category.

Brian popped a chip into his mouth. "I'll bet Tanner never gets brown cow, Morgan always keeps him after class working on her precious school newspaper."

"I'm willing to bet Tanner will get his chocolate milk, after they have told me they are all out."

Dot pulled out a wipee from her backpack and began a thorough scrubbing of the table. "I think you're wrong, Tori. Have you seen Tanner? It's obvious that he's never done anything wrong in his entire sweet little life."

Brian slurped up the last of his milk and made a successful three point swish into the nearby trash. "I'll take that bet, loser buys winner a McFlurry."

"Deal." I said.

I figured it was a win win situation. If I'm right I get a free McFlurry, if I'm wrong, at least I get my chocolate milk.

The next day, the three of us waited in anticipation of Tanner's arrival.

Finally, with only twenty minutes left in the lunch period Brian cleared his throat and announced, "Elvis has entered the building."

Dot whined as though I were about to deface a Picasso.

I looked over at Tanner dressed in an unbuttoned shirt that hung loosely over a t-shirt. The color illuminated his blue eyes. His digital camera remained leashed to his wrist. I quickly cut in line five students ahead of him.

"Sorry, we're out of chocolate," the server announced after I inquired.

I took the white and sauntered back to my seat. The three of us watched intently. Tanner paused in front of the lunch girl. We couldn't hear what he said but there was a brief discussion and then she giggled. Sure enough, she reached under the counter and produced a carton of *chocolate milk*! I couldn't help but climb up onto my seat and bust a little victory dance.

"I knew it, I knew it, uh huh, I knew it."

I paused mid-jig and noticed the entire room had grown silent watching my little show. I felt my face go flush and then descended back into my seat. Okay, so maybe it was a little over-the-top celebrating.

Finally, there's the ultimate torture tool.... the pep rally. Now, to an untrained eye this might look like a genuine attempt to promote class spirit. I can certainly see how the pom poms, balloons, and school band, attempting to play... well whatever it is they're trying to play, might deceive a newbie. But if you look under the microscope you'd see that only the privileged are rewarded.

Sure they feign fairness by distributing special awards for non-athletic achievement, as though there has to be a special place for us since we don't fit into the regularly recognized awards, like most valuable player. If we're so special how come the cheerleaders don't show up at the science fair, huh?

Our last rally finally pushed me over the edge. Our principal, Mr. Summers, has been trying to increase pep rally attendance, so he built up this big secret to be revealed at the next event. Brian, Dot and I showed up for front row seats but ended up in the nosebleed section. Obviously Mr. Summer's little teaser had worked.

Dot clutched a book and pink feather pen in her hand. "Do you think he's invited a movie star to our rally?"

Brian tossed his hacky sack ball into the air. "Doubtful."

I elbowed Brian almost causing him to lose his ball between the bleachers. "Don't be so negative. I read in the paper last night that a new band is in town. Maybe Mr. Summers invited them. I love the lead singer; he's so so talented."

Dot swooned. "Yes, talented. I knew it was a good idea bringing my autograph book, just in case."

Brian shushed us. "There's Mr. Summers now."

The room grew silent.

“Welcome everyone. As promised, we are going to have a little surprise today. I’ve asked the cheerleaders to pick out some students from the crowd to help us with our event.”

Tanner was snatched up first, and some other Preps, but then Morgan climbed up toward the top, and grabbed Dot.

I looked at Brian. “That’s odd. Why would she pick Dot?”

Brian shrugged. “Beats me.”

The “chosen ones” were then escorted out of the gym, while the rest of the rally continued with the usual sports awards, chants, and boring announcements. Finally Mr. Summers made good on his promise.

“Now, what you’ve all been waiting for. Our cheerleaders have been busy at work transforming some of our students into their rendition of the freakiest student on campus. Let’s bring them on one at a time and then vote for the best one.”

Tiffany walked in with Tanner dressed in a cheerleading costume. The crowd roared. Even in drag he was nice to look at. It was obvious, however, his legs were in desperate need of waxing. Next came a sporty girl donning pajamas and hair rollers. The tank top showed off her nicely cut muscles, and in a twisted freak of nature she looked pretty hot in the sponge rollers. I thought of my own dew. “No fair,” I huffed.

Three other cheerleaders came out proudly displaying their handiwork. Some were dressed in large oversized clothes; others had their hair colored various shades of red, blue and green.

I squirmed in my seat. “Where’s Dot?”

Brian pointed. “Here she comes now.”

I gasped. Morgan was proudly walking in with Dot who was dressed as...herself.

The room busted up and then some Preps from the crowd shouted “Freak.” Others joined in, “freak, freak, freak...”

I looked over at Dot eyeballing the floor and clutching tightly to her autograph book and feathered pen.

Brian leaned over. “I say we find a house and drop it on Morgan. It ‘s worked on wicked witches before.”

“That’s it!” I shouted. “She can’t do this to my people anymore.”

Brian flinched. “Your people? What are you Moses? You going to walk up to Morgan and shout, ‘Let my people go?’”

“All I know is this can’t go on any longer. I’m going to find a way to change things around here, even if it means sending plagues upon Morgan Winters.”

CHAPTER 2

“Honey, are you ready to go yet?”

“Dad, if I leave now how will I find out if the monkey on Animal 911 gets rescued or not? I mean come on it’s Saturday for heaven’s sake.” Besides, I hadn’t yet tamed *the beast*. That’s what I call my hair. I love to read stories where the heroine has naturally curly hair flowing in ringlets cascading down her face, but my mane, looking more like noodles overcooked in the microwave, would be featured in a horror novel instead.

“Tori, you said you wanted to help at the campaign office today, remember?”

I did want to go; I loved hanging out at my dad’s office and answering phones with, “Good afternoon, Robert Sanchez for City Council, “but really the

timing was all off. Then, the show flipped to a stupid commercial. It was...no, could it be?

"Dad, isn't that the guy you're running against?"

"Yeah, quick turn it up."

"Robert Sanchez served for eight years on the board of the local anti-abortion center. His attempts to force his extreme religious views on this community will cost many women their lives. So vote for someone who understands the needs of women, vote for me Rich Molina."

"Dad, that guy is so dirty they should call him The Mole. Costing women their lives? Some of the women you counseled were so depressed they wanted to end their lives, until you and Mom explained they had a choice about saving their babies'."

"I know."

"But Dad, why don't they reveal how Molina kicked all those elderly people out of their homes and then sold the land for a used car lot? Or report that he told everyone to conserve gas and then went out and bought himself a Hummer."

"Tori."

"What about the time he bought cigarettes for some minors?"

"Tori, that's not true, at least it's never been proven."

"It's true that he got a teacher fired because she accused his son of cheating, which he did. That guy is the biggest--"

"Tori stop!" Dad sighed and then grabbed his jacket off of the couch.

"Let's go, we have a lot of work to do."

Once we arrived at the office, I noticed that Nancy, his campaign manager, had stacked 'Vote for Robert Sanchez' posters on the table where I usually worked. I saw my mom at the back table talking on the phone. She

looked up and gave me the hold on a minute finger, which translated means stay put and don't take off to the candy machine.

Nancy stormed into the office wearing her someone killed my cat look. "Robert, have you seen the commercial? Molina's public relations team is killing us."

"Sure, saw it this morning. Hey, did you find those stats on unemployment?"

"Umm yes, here they are," Nancy said, handing over a stack of documents. "Did you know he lied to the teacher's union, saying you wanted to cut salaries?"

"I know."

"That he put up a billboard calling you Sponge Bob?"

"I saw it."

"What about the second grade boy scout troop he coaxed into wearing 'Vote Molina' t-shirts?"

Dad laughed. "Have they lowered the voting age again?"

Nancy huffed. "Robert, this isn't funny. You might want to start thinking about a plan of attack."

"Listen, Nancy I'm going to run this campaign solely on the issues. If I can't win that way, it's not worth it to me."

Mom clicked off the phone and proceeded to lift the large stack of posters off the table. "Grab some wires, Tori, We need to get these set up around town."

Bummer. I rather wanted to stay in the office and play games on the computer.

In no time, Mom and I were driving around town setting up posters. When we pulled up to one corner I couldn't help but notice the "Vote for Molina" sign. His signs were w-a-a-y nicer than my dad's, featuring a glossy

photo and large, bold lettering. I made an executive decision to place my dad's sign directly in front of Molina's.

My mom coughed and shook her head. "That's against the rules, and it's not right," she said.

Yeah, like Mr. Mole is so ethical. I huffed and placed my sign a yard away. But on the way back to the van I "accidentally" tripped on Molina's sign, unearthing some of the dirt around it. A good wind should bring it down altogether.

"Why are Dad's signs so boring?"

Mom pulled out of the lot heading toward our next drop off point. "They aren't boring, they just aren't as flashy.

"But Mom, flashy is in."

"Your dad is running a campaign focusing on positive change."

"Yeah, but how will they know about his changes and how great he is unless you add some pizzazz to his campaign?"

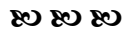
"Your dad has a budget to consider and..."

And I'm not sure what she said next because right at that very second I got a terrific idea. Okay, it was a brilliant idea. I realized at that moment, that geeks didn't have to become Preps to be accepted. The matrix could indeed be altered, and geeks could actually become the most popular people on campus.

We were no less victims of bad press and poor publicity than my dad was. And like him, what we needed was a complete public relations makeover. We needed to "make it real" to "just do it" something "M,mm M,mm Good." This was huge! I knew that I had accidentally stumbled upon a way to free my people.

I couldn't wait until Sunday. I needed to organize my team. We would have to strategize and at the right time make our move. Timing would be critical.

Before we were done the entire school would trade, letterman jackets, sneakers, and perhaps their cherished chocolate milks for a chance to be counted among the geeks, *The Geek Elite* that is.



Brian scratched his head. "I don't get it, Tori, you want to transform geeks into popular people?"

"Not just popular, bigger than that. Think super sized. Think Grande...No, Venti."

Dot worked a dandelion necklace while Brian lay on his back under the spruce tree we chose as the meeting place for our parents. Apparently, their Bible class was in overtime.

"Look, Dot, remember when your math team won last month's competition after answering all those problems? You didn't even end up in *The Eagle*, while Tanner the jock lost the game and still got the front page? And Brian, your creative essay was voted the best at last month's literature club meeting, but you weren't recognized at the last rally."

Brian drew down his sunglasses and peered at Tori. "Are you going somewhere with this?"

"Don't you think all of the geeks are tired of getting slighted?"

Dot crowned herself with the weeds. "Tori's right Brian, I think they may have hurt feelings."

Brian huffed, "I don't have any hurt feelings because that would mean I care, which I don't."

I tossed my Bible aside. "See that's the problem, we've all been put down so long that we can't fathom what respect and recognition would feel like. Geeks

will soon realize the benefits of having a great public relations team on their side. In the end they'll thank us."

Brian and Dot jolted to attention, "Us?"

"Come on you two, I need some help organizing the masses. This won't work if we aren't united."

Dot pulled off her crown. "Tori, some of these groups don't like each other."

"But why not?" I asked.

Dot pulled out her Sunday school notebook and began drawing a Ven Diagram. Well, first we have the drama geeks, who hate the science geeks.

I shook my head. "Why on earth would drama geeks and science geeks hate each other?"

"Because of the time the science geeks blew up that huge volcano and ruined all of the dwarf costumes stored in the lab."

Brian laughed. "I remember that."

"Then there's the chess club geeks, they hate the speech geeks."

"Because they talk too much?" I offered.

Dot chewed on the end of her pencil. "Well that too, but one afternoon the speech club couldn't find any timers to time their speeches with, so they borrowed the chess club's timers. When the chess club needed timers for their tournament they were nowhere to be found. It was pretty ugly."

"You can't rob people of their time," Bran said.

I pouted. Brian was having too much fun with this.

Dot returned to her diagram. "And of course we can't forget the band geeks."

"Who do they hate?" I asked.

"You mean," Dot corrected, "who hates them? And it's the techno geeks."

“And why don’t they get along?”

“Power,” Brian said.

This was getting very confusing. “I didn’t think band geeks had any power.”

“It’s not the kind of power you’re thinking,” Dot clarified. “It’s electrical power.”

“Huh?”

“One of the band geeks decided to ramp up this electrical guitar to see how loud it could go. What he didn’t know was the circuit he was using was the same one shared by the computer lab next door.”

“It didn’t...”

Brian clapped his hands together. “All their precious information blown into oblivion.”

“Lastly,” Dot continued, “are the Goths. Their enemy is...you know, I’m not sure who their enemies are?”

Brian leaned forward and whispered. “They don’t have any enemies because they *offed* them.”

I gasped. This wasn’t sounding very promising. Nevertheless, I wasn’t about to let a little dissent rain on my parade. “Okay so there are a few issues to deal with, but we will have to overlook our differences otherwise we will never be liberated from the social shackles that confine us. It’s obvious these people desperately need us. You have to help me lead them into the Promised Land. Come on guys, please?”

There was a pause. I held my breath. The thought of implementing this plan by myself was overwhelming. Then something happened that to this day still gives me chills. Off in the distance we could hear the choir’s words, “We are one in the bond of love....” I mean who could have planned that?

Dot grasped my hand. "I'm in."

I looked over at Brian who had lain back down and was pretending to be asleep. "Well?"

Dot nudged him.

"Yeah, okay I'm in, but I have my doubts if this will really work."

I smiled. "Oh ye of little faith."

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release-

Contacts: Tori Sanchez, Brian Jeeters, Dot Anderson

Geek Elite Club Rolls Onto Campus, the First of Its Kind

History is in the making at Warren High School as fellow students join a coalition set on shattering old stereotypes. The GE club will alter the course of student body culture forever as one unified voice, vibrant and admired.

This monumental meeting will take place today at lunch, in science room 102.

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I was amazed. Never had I seen so many nerds in one room before, unless you count the time the school offered a Microsoft lecture in the cafeteria.

The band geeks, with instruments in tow took up a great deal of the room. Two of the drummers rat-tatted tapped on the desk.

The speech geeks hung toward the back keeping a safe distance from the chess club, who sat up front tapping their timers after each carefully considered game move.

The drama people positioned themselves up front with me; why I'm not sure. And the techies had arrived early as I requested, but were now speaking fluent geek. Which is a language based almost completely on acronyms like: HTTP, XML, and OS X, which might stand for Outer Space X-men, for all that I know.

Brian brought in the science geeks who were at the library deeply engrossed in a discussion about String Theory. Others nerds continued to filter in. Still it seemed to me like one group was missing.

"Brian, where are the Goths?"

He shrugged. "How should I know, probably out killing a cat."

I shot him the *look*.

"Okay, sorry. I don't know. I gave a bunch of them your press release, so they should be here soon."

I clapped my hands together "Okay, people, let's get started."

I nodded at Dot who dimmed the front lights, and started my PowerPoint presentation. "Thank you for coming."

"Excuse me," one of the techno geeks called out, "but do you think it's safe to run that program with band members in the room?"

One of the drummers stood up. "Hey techy boy, maybe next time you might want to hit the save button once in awhile. That's on the tool bar next to the pretty picture of the printer."

One of the drama guys stood up. "I think the real risk here is holding this meeting in a science room. We could be blown up."

One of the science nerds shot back. "Well if you didn't keep your fairy costumes in our classroom that volcano incident would have never happened."

"They were dwarf costumes," a drama guy clarified.

"Whatever."

“People,” I shouted, we don’t have a long time for this meeting.”

“Lookout,” one of the chess geeks called out, they might be after our timers again.”

One of the speech geeks stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind her. The room grew silent from the impact.

I pressed ahead in spite of the thick atmosphere. “First let me begin by introducing you to the current popular people. In the first slide you’ll recognize Tanner, featured most often on the front page of the school news as the touchdown king, even though, technically, he’s only made one this year. He is known for his 19” neck, unnaturally white teeth, and bulging muscles that allow him to bench press 250.”

Dot swooned. “Amazing.”

This time I gave her the *look*. Okay so it’s understandable that one look at Tanner would rapidly increase the pitter-patter of any girl’s heart, but really, we needed to stay focused.

I continued. “In this next slide meet Tiffany recognized by her flawlessly styled hair, a wardrobe costing more than the GNP of most third world countries, and her impeccably clean fingernails that have never been exposed to KUT duty.”

This time there was actually howling noises rising from the band section, which I chose to ignore. “Finally, Morgan Winters, Barbara Walters wannabe and Pulitzer prize hopeful. A journalist so vicious she makes the paparazzi look like parents at a kindergarten graduation.”

A yell boomed from one of the drama people, “The lady Tori doth protest too much, methinks.”

Really, you kind of have to expect these sort of outbursts when you invite the thespian bunch. “Look, I’m not here to protest them, I’m here to introduce

you to another group of popular people The Geek Elite. It's out with the old and in with the new."

I tapped the slide presentation and up on the screen was a photo of every person sitting in the room, thanks to Yuki's camera phone finesse, and a quick download via the Internet.

The tuba player stood up, "Okay, now that's cool."

"Yes, and so are you," I said. "We are the new Preps."

Someone in the science nerd herd raised his hand. (You know I've never had someone raise his hand for me before. The experience was truly gratifying).

"Yes?"

"How do you plan on achieving the improbable?"

"I'm glad you asked. Dot, please pass out the packets. If you'll refer to page two of the *Geek Elite School Domination Plan*, you'll notice my overview. Basically, our challenge is to change the way our product, namely us, is currently viewed."

Drama geek Larry stood up. "Product? I'm a product?"

"Well, yes you are."

"Like toothpaste?"

"Kind of."

"Am I gel or tarter control?"

The whole room busted up in laughter.

I attempted to reel them back. "People, we have to put a new face on geekiness."

Larry slapped his face Home Alone style. "Oh great, now I'm pimple cream."

The laughter and antics continued when suddenly the door flew open. The room froze. One by one students donning black garb, white faces, and enough metal body piercing to play havoc on any airport screener, sauntered in.

Some of the speech geeks grew pale as they walked toward the back of the room. "Help?" I heard one of them whimper.

I stammered a little. "T-thank y-you for coming. I was just introducing our need to alter the way we are labeled."

One of the Goth guys shot me a vicious look. "We don't need a label."

"That's right," Larry chimed in, "cause you're already wearing a dog collar."

The group cracked up, and Larry ducked just in time to miss a flying textbook.

"Come on guys don't fight. We have to get along otherwise this won't work." Unfortunately, my plea fell on deaf ears. Larry had to get the last word in.

"Where's Buffy when you need her."

Then utter chaos.

The Goths started knocking down chairs to get to Larry who was scampering around the room tripping over band instruments. The chess nerds grabbed their boards and timers, and made a quick exit. The computer crowd hovered over their laptops like bodyguards sworn to take a hit. One of the science geeks shouted, "Survival of the fittest," and then quickly led his group out of the room. Larry continued to enrage the Goths by standing on top of the teacher's desk shouting out Shakespeareisms like, "He's mad, 'tis true 'tis pity," and "Out, damned spot!"

Dot tried to move the dessert cart in time, but Larry, attempting to escape his fate, dove right into it sending punch cups and Cheetos flying across the

room. He broke his fall by grabbing a nearby butterfly net, releasing several Monarchs. Helpless insects began taking refuge in human hair, and screams filled the room.

By this time I had grabbed the only thing handy, my shoe, and was pounding it against the podium attempting to restore order. But it was too late. I don't think Judge Judy herself could have brought order to this group. Eventually, everyone fled out the door, leaving behind sided desks and tiny creatures taking save harbor on a nearby Ficus tree.

I looked over at Dot huddled in the corner, and Brian who remained calmly reclined at a desk with his feet up. "Dang, I haven't had that much fun since the Star Trek convention last year."

"You call that fun? My meeting was ruined."

Brian grinned. "Yeah, but what a ride."

This was definitely something I hadn't anticipated. I mean it's not like I thought we'd be holding hands and singing Kum ba yah at the end of the meeting, but I wasn't expecting Armageddon either.

Dot came out of hiding. "As I told you before, Tori, some of these groups are enemies."

Brian retrieved the net and started picking out the cheese puffs and popping them into his mouth. "Give it up, Tori. You can't mix oil and water, or in this case grease."

"This is only a minor setback, Brian. I have a plan."

"That I'll like to see."

Me too.

CHAPTER 3

Unbelievable. Tons of people were lined up at Creek Park waiting in line with their pets. The menagerie boasted cute tabby kittens, wrinkled bulldogs and everything in between. Some secured their furry companions by leash; others toted them in animal carriers.

“Mom, why are all those people lined up at the park with their pets?”

“Keep your eyes on the road, Tori,” Mom cautioned as we made our way through the neighborhood. “Maybe you should turn off the stereo.”

“The music helps me drive. So what’s with the pets?”

“It’s a free vaccine clinic for dogs and cats.”

I reached for a sip of my frappichinio. Mom stepped on her imaginary passenger brake pedal. “Both hands on the wheel, Tori. You do remember how to get to the campaign office right?”

I caught sight of the large channel 12 van. “Why is the television station there?”

Mom leaned over to check my speedometer and then looked back toward the park. “I heard Rich Molina’s getting his cat vaccinated. I’m sure he called them to shoot the monumental event. You know, the candidate who supports animals. It’s a worthy cause.”

“Oh I get it, free publicity for his campaign.” Were there no limits to what my dad’s opponent wouldn’t do to get votes? I wondered if the news station also wanted to know about the time Molina ran over a dog in our neighborhood and kept on going. Yeah, he’s an animal lover all right. Then it donned on me.

“Mom, I don’t remember Molina having a cat.”

Mom giggled. "Maybe it's a rent a cat."

I sat at the stop sign and glanced over. Molina's borrowed feline was in the process of scratching his eyes out, trying with all its might to break free. They say that animals are a good judge of character.

"Hey Mom, what's dad's cause?"

"Tori, I think the speed limit is 35 in this area."

"Mom."

"I don't know if you'd call it a cause, but for years he's been working on building a woman's and children's shelter for the homeless."

I had forgotten about that. Every Tuesday night for the past year he'd met with town officials to discuss the shelter. A few months ago the city donated the land, now they were waiting on the funding to start the project. "Dad should call the news and ask them to feature a story on that."

Mom grasped onto the roof handle as though she anticipated an off-road excursion. "The newspaper reported about the land donation."

I swung a quick left, maneuvered perfectly into a compact space, killed the engine, and handed mom the keys. "But it wasn't about Dad."

Mom excelled for the first time since leaving home. "Because it's not about him, it's about the shelter."

I realized two things that day. First, the Geek Elite needed a cause, and second, the next time I drive with my mom I need to look into some serious medication...for her.

By Monday morning I still hadn't figured out a way to unify the Geek Elite, but then again, I didn't need to, Morgan did it for me.

For the past month students had been assigned their date with destiny at the campus career office. Students were required to sit at the computer and type in their favorite school subjects, interests, and hobbies. Then, akin to fortune

cookies or horoscopes, the master computer would spit out their future. I was supposed to become a future airline pilot. I wonder if my flying phobia might present a problem? Nah.

Results from this “socialistic experiment in weirdness” were supposed to be kept confidential. But somehow Morgan tapped into the program’s memory, and took it upon herself to reclassify students in regard to their coolness level.

Those who had taken all the advanced placement courses, had an interest in anything remotely related to math, and engaged in strange hobbies like bug collecting for example, were definitely placed in the mutant category. Morgan then posted the results in *The Eagle*.

That day I reached for a book in my locker when someone tapped me on my shoulder, I slowly turned and...“Yikes!”

“Calm down, it’s me, Brian.”

“Brian? I didn’t recognize you. Why are you wearing that ski mask?”

Brian reached in his backpack and pulled out a copy of *The Eagle*. His score was nowhere near the “You’re so cool” area. “I think it’s because I listed Middle Earth as my hobby.”

“Yah, that’ll do it.”

“Tori, this isn’t right.”

I dodged a spitball that flew from across the hall. “Hey, I thought you were Mr. I -don’t-care?”

“I didn’t until I went to gym class. The guys in the locker room were merciless. Morgan must have told them about my answers, because they kept calling me their little Hobbit, and told me that they’d trash me up if I didn’t hand over the ring.”

“Trash you up?”

“Don’t ask.”

"Psst."

"What did you say?" I looked over at Brian who was trying to find a way to fit his eyeglass stems through the eyeholes of his mask. "I didn't say anything."

I heard the voice again coming from the *Vote Morgan for Student Body President* poster. "Over here." Dot cowered behind a nearby garbage can.

"Dot? Get over here," I commanded.

She stood up just as a student tossed a half empty soda can and missed. Dot sloshed over with her Dr. Pepper shoe.

She so needed a hug. "Did you get a mutant rating too?"

"No."

Brian and I chorused. "No?"

"Then why are you hiding?" I asked.

Dot looked both ways. "I got the highest score for coolness."

Really, I don't think I could have been more shocked if she told me that the President of the Untied States was dropping by for lunch. "How on earth did you get the coolest student score?"

Dot gazed down. "I lied on the test."

Brian and I cracked up.

Brian raised Dot's hand as though she'd won a boxing match. "May I present to you Warren High School's coolest student, Dot Anderson."

Dot pulled away. "Stop it. I feel terrible for lying, besides don't you know how bad they'll tease me? Everyone knows that I'm not the coolest."

I put my arm around her. "Well I think you are."

That week no geek was safe. Those who received a cool score on the test were more convinced of their superior status, after all there were now tests to

prove it. Almost all of us were inundated with huge amounts of Spam offering pimple creams, breath mints, and hair removal kits.

Brian kept his distance from all on-campus trash receptacles. Posters were pasted up on the gymnasium that read, 'No geeks allowed.' Theatrical Larry got the worst of it for scoring the lowest on the test. Some of the Preps even tried to offer him a trophy.

Poor Dot was cornered by Morgan and her BFF, Tiffany. "You lied on that test." Moran accused. "And there's no way you're going to be a fashion designer someday."

Tiffany picked at Dot's clothes. "Yeah, they don't sell name brands at your kind of stores."

I stormed over. "Leave her alone."

Morgan snickered. "If it isn't the Nerd Nanny. I heard about your little meeting last week. Mr. Shoeman said his science room would never be the same. I suggested calling a pest exterminator."

"Then you two would definitely want to stay clear of that room. Come on Dot."

Brian scooted in next to me Thursday at lunch and opened up his white milk. "Just when you think that things can't get worse around here, they do."

I looked over at Dot sitting across from me donning a pair of sunglasses.

I may be sadistic, but this was better than I could've hope for. "I'll tell you what I think?"

Brian cocked his head. "I'm afraid ask."

"I think it's time for another meeting."

Dot choked and dropped her Ho Ho.

NEWS RELEASE**For immediate release-****Contacts:** Tori Sanchez, Brian Jeeters, Dot Anderson**Students Protest Coolness Test**

Students scorned by the recent bogus test, put out by the biased media, gather today at lunch in protest. A counter offensive will be discussed. Members of the Geek Elite club are encouraged to come to room 28, and take heart... the cool doctor is in.

###

Brian scrunched his face. "The cool doctor?"

I gave him a shove. "Just hand out the flyers, but don't give any to the Goths."

Dot filed a stack of flyers into her pack. "Tori don't you think that they'll feel left out?"

"Dot, do you want to scrape Doritos products off of the floor again?"

"Um, not really, but it was Larry who..."

"Fine, then leave out the night stalkers."

That afternoon room 28 was buzzing with bad attitudes.

"I think that the test was totally unfair, attending computer lectures is a perfectly legitimate hobby."

"My cool factor was diminished greatly when I listed the library as the best place to hang out. Can you believe that?"

"I think if Morgan had used the bell curve the scores would have changed significantly."

Math geeks, gotta love 'em. I could tell that the cool test had done more than damage everyone's egos; it had wounded their soul. It was one thing if Morgan wanted to attack me, I was sort of used to it, but these people were my comrades in the world of geekdom. They were definitely off limits. I rose and stood behind the podium. I took a deep breath and began.

"Today we come together as one unified group. A chosen people, bound together by the cruel yoke of scorn and ridicule. Together, with my leadership, we will march into the promised land of popularity and defeat the Preps. We will live in a land of chocolate milk and honey and be free."

I paused, waiting for a rally cry to rise from the masses. Instead I got...blank stares.

Theo the chess nerd cleared his throat. "Can you say that one more time?"

Okay, let's rewind. Better yet, new disk. "Look, how many of you have heard of the Green Party?"

Several hands went up.

"What's their cause?"

One of the speech geeks yelled out, "The environment."

"Exactly. That's how groups gain recognition, by adopting a worthy cause. I figured it was a good idea for the Geek Elite to have a cause."

Dot clapped her hands. "That's a great idea. I've always wanted to support a worthy cause. What's our cause? Does it involve baby animals?"

One of the science geeks volunteered. "My brother just got kicked out of college because he spent too much time on the beach. My mother says he's a lost cause."

The group snickered.

Brian looked around the room. "Personally, I don't think there's a more needy cause than us."

'Exactly," I agreed.

"Wait a minute," Theo said, "How can we be a cause?"

I walked around the podium and took a seat on top of a nearby desk. "Everyone knows that it's cruel to pick on someone with a disability. When Morgan attacked us that is exactly what she did."

The group started mumbling. Theo cleared his throat. "What exactly is our disability?"

"We all suffer from S.D.D."

Immediately the computer geeks popped open their laptops and began running a search engine on S.D.D.

Larry, who'd been cleaning his teeth with a plastic toothpick, went ballistic. "I knew it. I just knew it. I've been telling my mom for years to take me to the doctor. How long do I have."

I grinned. "Most likely you'll suffer from it the rest of your very long life."

Larry tossed his pick aside. "But tell me, is there a cure?"

I glanced at Larry's unruly hair and shirt proclaiming, 'Science Rules.' "Probably not."

Brian raised his hand, and started speaking before I could call on him. "Tori, I've never heard of S.D.D. What' is it?"

Leave it to Brian to get to the facts. "S.D.D. is the acronym for Socially Deficient Disorder."

Larry placed his hands on his head. "This is all coming together now. No wonder I have no social skills. I feel so vindicated."

The group laughed.

Theo stood up. "Come on guys, this is bogus, we don't have S.D.D because there isn't such a thing."

Some of the kids started packing up their backpacks to leave. This was bad. I had to get them back and quick. "Since we all suffer from S.D.D. there are many benefits available to us."

Theo paused. "Benefits, what kind of benefits?"

"Too many to go over right now. But I can promise you this, we will gain superior status by embracing this disorder."

The group looked to Theo for his response. "What's our other choice?" he asked.

"You can try to become popular the old fashioned way, by learning how to be cool."

Everyone dropped their backpacks and sat back down. Theo looked around the room. "Okay you win. Game on."

I love it when things go as planned. "Great. The only thing we need to decide at this meeting is who will be our S.D.D poster child."

All eyes fell upon Larry who was now in the process of trimming his toenails. He looked up and dropped the clipper. Facing a room full of stares he shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "Where do I sign?"

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