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Some Little Secrets

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SOME LITTLE SECRETS

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Chapter 1

"Hola Los Angeles!" Madison Thompson cried as she and her best friend, Alexis Simons, walked off the plane and into LAX. Their mothers, Anne Thompson and Emily Simons, followed closely, talking about something completely boring to the two fifteen years olds.

"Yeah, hola!" Alexis, mostly known as 'Lexi', repeated. She pulled her Kate Spade tote on her shoulder and fluffed up her dark blonde hair. "That's how you say 'hello' in Spanish, right?"

Madison giggled. "Yes, Lex. I think 99.9% of Earth's population knows what 'hola' means."

"Oh."

Madison giggled even more, then reached inside her purple-and-blue Juicy Couture bag for her silver Elph. She suddenly pulled Lexi by the arm and took a picture the next second. The girls looked at the picture, then scowled at the horrible photo.

"Yikes," Lexi shuddered. "That pic SOLs."

"SOLs?" Madison frowned in confusion. "Wait, doesn't that mean--"

"Yeah, I know, but I made up a new meaning. SOL stands for sucks out loud."

"Ooh, nice one," Madison high-fived her friend. The four (yes, including the girls' mothers) headed towards the baggage claim. Girls around their age donned bright colored sundresses and boys wore baggy shorts and striped Hollister polos.

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"If you keep taking pictures like that," Lexi said, "we'll have to hire a professional--or we won't have *any* to bring home!"

"Aww, shut up!"

Madison and Lexi were on spring break. This was the first day of their four-day trip, and the girls already brainstormed ideas of what they were going to do. But for some reason, Madison had this weird feeling that this vacation was going to be a lot different than the others (it already *was*), and hopefully was going to be the best one yet.

"Isn't this great?" Madison asked Lexi. "No more papers, no more Alessandra, and no more long-sleeved tees."

"Agreed," Lexi said as she dropped the load of *Seventeen* magazines that she brought with to read on the plane. Madison helped her pick the magazines up, and then continued to walk to the baggage claim.

Minutes later, the girls grabbed their Louis Vuitton luggage and slowly walked to the automatic doors, Anne and Emily still following behind.

"Now what, Mom?" Madison called out to Anne. Hundreds of cars whooshed by, and people accidentally bumped into each other.

"Umm..." Anne mumbled. She looked around as she searched for their source of transportation, and then called back to her daughter, "Over here!"

Madison and Lexi paced behind, their LV luggage rolling along, when they spotted their ride, a black limousine.

"Gee, a limo," Madison rolled her eyes. "Can't we at least be normal and rent a car?"

"I know," Lexi said.

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As much as anyone would think that they're crazy, Madison and Lexi were used to the high-luxury life. Their fathers--Devin Thompson and Evan Simons--had 'big' brains. They were CEOs of their own businesses, selling and servicing computers, printers, and other technology for their business customers. Also, when smaller companies in their industry were doing poorly, the girls' dads bought those companies. They then made those companies profitable, and reaped great financial rewards.

So their families had their own personal drivers, limos, wore designer clothing, ate at five-star restaurants every other night, and lived in beautiful mansions in Oak Brook, Illinois. They lived "The American Dream". But it was also overwhelming.

The limo pulled out into the sunshine, giving Madison a warm feeling. She rolled down the window so she could look at the scenery without a tinted window in the way, and feel the warm breeze. It was different than Chicago--warmer air, more sun, palm trees, mountains, and the Pacific Ocean.

"Do you think we'll be able to see movie stars while we're here?" Lexi asked Madison as she flipped through the pages of the May issue of *Seventeen*.

Madison turned away from the window and pressed her finger on the button to close it. "I highly doubt it," she said to her friend. "But imagine--meeting Scarlett Johansson, Rihanna, Selena Gomez..."

"Jake Ericson," Lexi grinned as she pointed out the famous movie star in a Levi's ad from her magazine.

Madison giggle-blushed. "He *is* my favorite actor."

"Same here. He was *amazing* in *The Picture Perfect Life*."

"I agree."

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Madison sighed. Being famous herself would mean the world to her. She never had any acting or singing lessons before, but the angels must have given her magic vocal chords because she was chosen as the main character in all the musicals she's been in since the sixth grade. Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. Kathy in *Singing in the Rain*. Julie in *Carousel*. Calamity Jane in *Calamity Jane*. And this year, she has the role of Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Yea!

The last thing that would ever happen to her would be to meet Jake Ericson, much less star in a movie with him. The closest she'd ever get to becoming famous might be a bit part in the ensemble of *Cats* on Broadway.

As if she could read her mind, Lexi said, "Hey, if you keep dreaming and working hard, you'll be able to meet Jake and will be famous too. You'll see."

Madison gave Lexi a small smile, then continued to look out the window.

"You know how I know if a guy could be a great boyfriend?" Lexi asked.

"How?"

"When he takes pictures of you that don't turn out blurry."

Madison laughed.

Boys really didn't matter to her anyway. It wasn't because someone was rude to her, or taken and she gave up. A boyfriend just wasn't a necessity, that's all. So Madison lived almost sixteen years single and happy. Yeah, she used to dress up in Disney Princess gowns for Halloween when she was younger and she did wish that she and some prince would get married and live happily ever after. But now since she was older and wiser, things were different.

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For example, instead of a princess, her Halloween costume would consist of a dark pair of jeans, comfortable gym shoes, a sweater and a parka.

Madison knew Lexi lived single and happy too. Except sometimes she did complain about not having a boyfriend because she felt that she wasn't pretty enough. The real reason was that three quarters of her school's population already had a boyfriend or girlfriend, mostly because of their high social standards (a.k.a. the football, basketball, and soccer stars, the cheerleaders...). And considering that there were exactly one thousand students attending Washington High School, 750 were taken. And of the remaining 250, Madison couldn't seem to relate to any of them, except maybe academically. So, so far, she didn't want a boyfriend. End of story.

Jake Ericson was the last thing on Madison's mind. But yeah, she secretly admitted that he was gorgeous. His light brown hair, dark brown eyes, and perfect tan could definitely make him the new face of Abercrombie.

Madison once read in a magazine that Jake was one of the nicest and most caring teens on the planet. He sheltered and fed the poor in Africa, raised money for people who had cancer, helped out after Hurricane Katrina hit the Southeast, and sent caring cards to almost every family who lost someone on September 11th, 2001.

With his good looks and beautiful personality, Madison knew that millions of girls were crushing on him. No, wait, scratch that, make that *billions* of girls. Madison did have a tiny crush on him last year, but knew that it was impossible to even meet such a popular celebrity.

She shook her head to remove her thoughts as if she were an Etch-A-Sketch. She hated herself every time she started to drool over some guy that was unattainable. If she

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stopped dreaming about finding her prince when she was seven, why start now, practically nine years later?

"So Madison, what do you think?" Anne asked.

"Think about what?"

Great, I dream about a super-cute movie star and don't pay attention to more important things.

"Do you or do you not want to shop with Alexis at Rodeo Drive this afternoon?"

I guess it really wasn't that important after all.

"Uh, of course I want to go shopping," Madison said. "Who would pass up a perfect opportunity to go shopping with your best friend on Rodeo Drive?"

"Well, we all thought *you* might since you spaced out on us for a minute there," Emily chuckled.

"Yea!" Lexi clapped excitedly as Madison nodded.

"Alright ladies," the driver said as he pulled up to a large building, "here, we are, at your hotel." His voice made Madison miss her friendly driver, Ian. He was probably watching the White Sox game and sipping wine with her father, Devin.

After the driver, whose name Madison couldn't remember, unloaded the trunk of the limousine, the mothers and Madison and Lexi wheeled their belongings inside and up to the front desk of the hotel.

A thirty-something blonde-haired woman stood behind the desk and smiled at the four. "Hello ladies, and welcome to the Beverly Luxe Hotel. Can I help you?"

Surprisingly to Madison, the woman didn't sound like one of those tour guides who said the same thing ten times a day, and she didn't sound like one of those corny airplane

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attendants that faked sweetness in order to control their temper.

"Yes, we've booked three rooms for four days, under Anne Thompson," Anne said to the woman. Madison looked at the woman's silver name tag and realized that her name was Andrea. Madison also couldn't help but notice how well Andrea's silver hoop earrings matched with her beaded Old Navy sandals. The accessories looked great with her turquoise Ralph Lauren polo and knee-length jean skirt. Finally--someone who dressed simply but had a classic style.

After a few minutes, Andrea gave the mothers the room keys and had a bellhop take the luggage up to their rooms. Anne and Emily planned to have their own separate rooms, while Madison and Lexi shared.

"How about you girls freshen up before you go shopping," Emily said while they were all in the mirrored elevator.

"Yup, we were going to do that, right Madison?" Lexi asked.

"Yeah," Madison replied, looking at her cell phone for the time. It was 1:30 PM.

"Okay then," Anne said. "Marion will be driving you over there, while we eat lunch."

"Who's Marion?" Lexi asked.

"The limousine driver," Emily answered. Luckily for Madison, she wasn't the only one who forgot what Marion's name was.

Once they reached the 12th floor, Madison and Lexi hunted for room 1210 while Anne looked for room 1208 and Emily looked for room 1209. Of course, all three rooms were

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right next to each other, so none of them had a hard time searching.

Madison, who held the door key, slipped it into the lock, pushed down on the cold, steel handle, and opened the door. The room was great--the walls were a soft, pastel green, and the doors, ceiling, and carpeted floor were as white as the clouds they flew through about an hour ago. Her and Lexi's luggage were lined up neatly by the mini refrigerator, which held up a marble counter, a perfect place to charge their cell phones. A cream-colored leather couch and two matching chairs sat around a glass coffee table, all directly in front of the 42-inch flat screen TV. One door led to the bedroom, with two queen-sized beds and a white wooden nightstand. The other led to the bathroom.

"Nice room," Lexi commented as she slowly walked around, admiring the great view of downtown Los Angeles from the wide, space-y window.

Because Madison was still at the doorway, the bellhop who brought up their luggage returned with a bouquet of daisies without having to knock. "Here you go miss," he said. "Compliments of the hotel."

He turned to leave, but when Madison called out, "Wait!" he turned back around to see Madison holding out a perfect ten-dollar bill. She walked over to him and said, "Dude, thanks for the flowers and for getting our luggage up here."

Madison never cared about what others thought of how she spoke. She always called the boys 'Dudes', especially if they were her lab partner or something like that at school.

She walked back to her room and reopened the door. Lexi saw the flowers and instantly asked, "Where did you get those?"

Madison quickly replied, "Compliments of the hotel."

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“Awesomeness!” Lexi yelled out, another word that both girls used frequently.

There was an empty vase on the coffee table, which Madison concluded was for the flowers that the guests received from the hotel. Once the daisies were neatly arranged, Madison joined Lexi in hanging up their clothes in the closet in the bedroom, and putting all of their cosmetics in the bathroom.

Madison was still setting up her things while Lexi marched over to the closet and sifted through her T-shirts, tank tops, skirts, jeans, shoes, and bags. “What’s the temperature outside?”

“I think it’s like seventy-six, or something like that,” Madison called from the bathroom. She squirted the hotel’s complimentary perfume in the air and sniffed it. It smelled disgusting, similar to old, rotten flowers, so she threw the bottle into the garbage can. A screeching crash echoed from the metal wastebasket, but Madison didn’t care. It was nice of the hotel to add so much free stuff for their stay, but to Madison, the staff really needed to realize that it was one thing to give out fresh flowers and it was another to hand out really bad perfume.

She left the bathroom and sat on her bed, waiting for Lexi to speed it up, but stood up again to check her reflection in one of the three circular mirrors in the room. Her long, brunette hair was straightened to perfection, and her brown eyes sparkled under the light coats of mascara and eye shadow.

Compared to other girls around her age, Madison was about in the middle when it came to height and below average when it came to weight. She wasn’t that into sports although she was actively involved. She used to compete in track in the spring, play softball in the summer, soccer in the fall, and figure skate during the winter when she was younger. She stopped all of that two years ago when she injured her right ankle.

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Lexi on the other hand, was never part of a sports team, or any sport, for that matter. She occasionally swam, but that was about it. Lexi was about the same height and was the same weight as Madison, but she had wavy, dark blonde hair and green eyes. Only once did someone mistake them for sisters, but this of course wasn't true.

Lexi did have an older brother, whose name was Brad. He and Lexi looked almost exactly alike and could pass off as twins. But Brad was a little bit over two years older than Lexi and Madison. Unlike his little sister, he was a baseball player. He planned on attending the University of Florida in the fall, where he'd be able to play ball year-round.

Even though Lexi usually whined about the pains of having an older brother, Madison wished that she had a brother or a sister. She was an only child, and at times it got boring when no one wanted to hang out or watch TV with her. It would have been fun to have a brother. Or a sister.

Madison never had a dog or a cat or any other pet either. It wasn't that her parents feared that she'd be irresponsible, but they themselves didn't want to spend time getting food and training and grooming the pet. And like most people, her father Devin went by the philosophy "Time is money. When you're wasting time, you're wasting money." But if her family could hire a limousine driver and live in the heart of Oak Brook, Illinois, why even bother with that motto?

Lexi came out of the bathroom and interrupted Madison's thoughts. "Okay...what do you think of my outfit?" Lexi wore a green Juicy dress over light wash jeans and a white tank. Her gold gladiator sandals added just the right touch to make the outfit totally boho-chic. If asked on a scale of one to ten, Madison would have given Lexi a perfect ten.

"It looks great, Lexi," Madison smiled genuinely. She walked over to the closet and pulled out a pair of dark jeans, a tank top, and white PINK sandals. She wasn't in the mood to

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wear the good things and besides, they're better being worn during a party or some other event.

"Is that what you're gonna wear?" Lexi called out to Madison.

Madison sighed as she washed her hands in the bathroom. "I don't want to get all dressed up just to go shopping. The other stuff that I brought with probably will be worn somewhere else."

"Yeah, but this is the whole point of going shopping," Lexi said. "When you shop, you go into stores. In the stores, you see awesome clothes, shoes, and purses, and then you buy them. Ya got it?"

Madison stepped out into the bedroom. "Lex, a half an hour ago you agreed with me when I sarcastically said I wanted to be chauffeured in a limo. Now, you can't wait to spend thousands of dollars on clothes." Madison returned to the bathroom, quickly changed, and came out hopping on one foot, pulling on a flip-flop on the other.

Lexi frowned. "Hey, a *week* ago, you said you couldn't *wait* to go shopping. What's with the change of heart?"

Madison shrugged, and then dropped her red Brighton wallet into her black Chloé bag along with her lip-gloss, cell phone, sunglasses, and hand sanitizer. She didn't want to argue about anything, especially not about stupid things like clothes. But Lexi was right, except Madison didn't know herself why she suddenly lost her interest in shopping. Maybe the warm weather was making her head spin.

She threw her bag onto her bed, then left the bedroom and plopped down on a chair and flipped on the TV. Like most hotels, the channel that first appeared on the TV gave tips on how to use the remote, how to pick out a movie, or how to work the Nintendo. Madison ignored all of it and then surfed the channels until she saw Jake Ericson's perfect face on ESPN.

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He was standing in the middle of a soccer field, wearing a burnt-orange-and-white uniform. Madison secretly thought that the uniform brought out the amber sparks in his warm, brown eyes.

Standing with him was his best friend Blake Harrington, who worked for Kiss FM back in Chicago. The two had their own TV show, *The Blake and Jake Show*, and mostly talked about random things, from music to movies, to food and sports. Madison usually watched the show, but because of all the homework she had before spring break, she didn't see any of the latest episodes. Luckily, Blake and Jake shared a Youtube account, so they put up all of the episodes.

"For a couple of years now, you played soccer on your school's team," Blake was saying. "So, buddy, how do you juggle playing soccer, paying attention to school work, and rehearsing and acting in movies?"

"That's a question I get a lot," Jake admitted with a laugh. Another one of his qualities Madison admired--his smile and his laugh were contagious. "I go to school like any other person my age, then have soccer practice for one hour, three days a week after school. On weekends, or the days that I don't have a practice or a game, I work on a movie or co-star with you on our show."

"What's going on with you today?"

"I just finished a soccer game," Jake said. "My team won, six to one."

"Congrats dude," Blake slapped his friend on the back. Both guys burst out laughing, which made Madison blush just like any other Jake Ericson fan. He was so cute. "So are we gonna get some Cokes next?"

Jake shrugged. "Maybe," he said, trying to suppress his laughter. "But before we leave, I just want to say to America that everyone should eat right, get lots of sleep, and exercise

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daily.” The corny but true line made Madison roll her eyes as Jake and Blake laughed, again. She flipped off the TV right when Lexi barged in from the bedroom.

“Sooo, what’s going on?” Lexi asked, all bubbly. She didn’t seem the slightest bit annoyed from their tiny argument earlier.

“Just flipping through the channels,” Madison replied innocently. She was about to check her wrist, but then realized that she wasn’t wearing a watch. “What time is it?”

Lexi took a minute to think. “I think it’s three o’ clock.”

Madison shook her head and got up from her chair. “I’m a hundred percent sure that it’s not *that* late. Seconds later she appeared from the bedroom, her purse on her shoulder and her silver Motorola in her left hand. “It’s only two o’ clock.”

“Boy, I was off.” Lexi looked at the white carpet.

“Uh, yeah!” Madison giggled. “Should we go now?”

Lexi nodded. “Yeah, I want to go. I’m bored.”

“We’ve only been up here for half an hour.”

“Oh.”

Madison shook her head again, then she and Lexi walked out of the suite. Both girls went to their mothers’ rooms, informing them that they were leaving and should be back by no later than five-thirty.

The girls rode down the same mirrored elevator once more, and sauntered out of the hotel out to the limo. Marion and his vehicle were already at the door. Madison was under the impression that Anne informed him of their plans.

“You girls going to Rodeo Drive?” he asked once everyone was buckled in.

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"That's correct," Madison said with a smile before pulling out a copy of *Hamlet* from her purse. The book was small enough to fit inside.

Lexi gasped. "You brought a book with when we're about to shop?"

"Relax--I only brought it with to let the time pass by more quickly on the way to and from Rodeo Drive." Madison felt proud of herself for keeping up with her reading assignments, even though she was on spring break. "What are you planning on doing for the ride?"

Her friend held up a hot-pink iPod. "I'm gonna listen to music."

"Fine..." Madison trailed off. "Oh, but be careful, I read in *Seventeen* that listening to music too loudly on iPods can cause hearing loss."

"Are you serious?" Lexi threw the iPod at her bag, disgusted.

Madison shrugged, and then lost herself in the story. Since *Hamlet* is a play, it was a different read than her other books. She could have chosen to read one of her teen novels, but she liked that she was doing something educational in her spare time.

When she finished one chapter, Madison put down her book and looked out the window for the rest of the ride, while Lexi played Bejeweled on her cell. She tried to not think about Jake Ericson and how unbelievably cute he was. But it was so hard...

Here we go again.

Luckily, the many Starbucks stores and fashionably dressed people distracted Madison. It was a clear sign that they were almost there.

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Marion pulled to a stop right next to the Brook's Brothers store, then got out of the limo to open the door for the girls. "Here we are ladies--Rodeo Drive."

"Wow!" Lexi ogled as Madison simply looked at the street itself. Shiny cars sped past and women walked around with bright-colored purses on their shoulders and Starbucks drinks in hand. She could already see signs such as Chanel, Ralph Lauren, and Juicy Couture, the excitement finally starting to creep back into her heart.

Madison turned away to look at the driver. "Thanks for the ride, Marion. Would you mind picking us up at five, right at this same spot?"

"I'll be here at five, Miss Thompson," Marion slightly tipped his hat, although it was a Dodger's baseball cap. "You and Miss Simons have a great afternoon."

"Thanks, Marion." Madison waved, and then skipped off to join her friend, who was already a few paces ahead. "Ready to shop?"

Lexi smiled brightly. "Yeah! Where do you want to go first?"

"We have to go into Juicy, first. I've decided that I need a new purse."

"Ooh, sounds like a good idea," Lexi said. "I'll get a new short-sleeved hoodie."

"What color?"

"Black."

The two girls linked arms and skipped down the sidewalk as if they were off to see the Wizard of Oz. Suddenly, Madison was very grateful that she was on spring break and not in a classroom filled with wooden desks and posters of Einstein. It was the perfect time to get away from homework and have

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some fun. Good thing she accidentally left her copy of *Hamlet* in the limousine.

Chapter 2

He looked around the street. Other than a group of girls, no one else was holding a camera of any kind.

A loud giggle erupted from the small huddle. The source of their delight was a teen magazine one of the girls was holding. On the cover of the magazine was one of the most popular movie stars in the world. *Oh, brother.*

He gave the girl with the magazine an evil look, and then continued away on his bike. The girl must have noticed him because she called out, "Don't start hating every girl on the planet just because you're not Jake Ericson! You boys probably all wish you were him."

He laughed.

Believe me, right now, I definitely don't want to be Jake Ericson.



"Get me outta here!" Madison complained. She and Lexi literally fell out of the Versace store when the large group taking pictures inside had backed them up against the door. She checked herself out in the window's reflection. Her hair was fine and so were the dark jeans and lavender tank that she wore. She still felt aggravated by not only being crushed, but from Lexi's whining over not finding some necklace at Tiffany's. All Lexi did afterwards was complain about the store's poor stocking while Madison calmly reminded her that she already had millions of charm necklaces and bracelets.

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And yet who knew that a group of tourists would ruin the stop at the store on a perfectly calm day? Everything was fine up to that point. It wasn't the usual I'm-annoyed-by-all-of-these-people-blocking-my-way-through-this-store feeling that got to Madison's head. It was just really loud with the tourists screaming in the place. Even the ones working in Versace looked annoyed.

But that's life, Madison tried to think positively. *Everyone knows why Rodeo Drive is special.*

"Relax," Lexi said. "I'm sure there is a good explanation of why there are so many people here." She adjusted her Prada messenger bag and dusted her jeans.

Well, *almost* everyone knew why Rodeo Drive is special.

Madison shook her head. Lexi sometimes acted like a ditz. "Lexi."

"Yes?"

"One word. VACATION!"

"Oh."

It wasn't the only word, but it was good enough. All of the items in the stores on Rodeo Drive were of course quite expensive. Not everyone can actually afford to buy there. It was like Chicago's Michigan Avenue, except on the West Coast. Thanks to the constant begging and promises about responsibility the girls worked up, Madison and Lexi held in their hands (well, right now, their wallets) what every girl wants-a Visa. Now, they could buy anything they wanted.

Yea!

Madison's excitement kept building throughout the entire afternoon, up until the girls reached Tiffany's. Once Lexi started whining, all Madison wanted to do was go back to the hotel and take a nap.

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Other than that unsuccessful stop, the afternoon was fine. Madison did buy a pink-and-green purse at Juicy Couture and Lexi bought her jacket. Besides that, Madison didn't purchase anything else. Lexi did, unsurprisingly.

Let's see, where to begin?

At Armani, she bought a beaded, black, strapless dress for no special reason. Next door at Hermès, she purchased five scarves: one hot pink, two white, one brown, and one navy blue. Then at Michael Kors, she saw a pair of metallic sandals, which she grabbed the first pair in her size that she saw and paid for them immediately. After that, Lexi ran ahead to Yves Saint Laurent to buy three bottles of nail polish. Madison would have named the shades of the polish, but the headache that was creeping up made her forget.

The grand total of Lexi's buying-ness came out to approximately \$900. And this was only so far!

She tried to feign excitement by doing what she and Lexi usually did while shopping--they looked at all of the cool mannequins and displays of all of the other stores they passed, each girl wondering which stores to hit next. Once they reached the Louis Vuitton store, Lexi stopped suddenly, pulled out a little notebook and started bobbing in place. "Guess what I worked on during History last week? I was soooo bored, so I decided to make some jokes! Isn't that cool?"

Okay, that was unexpected.

Madison grinned. Lexi made even the littlest things into a big deal. She was proud of her friend's boldness, but she had one question to ask. "So you worked on these during the Constitution test?"

Lexi stopped bobbing. "There was a test?"

"Forget it. Tell me one of your jokes."

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Lexi flipped through her little notebook. "Ooh, here's the best one. Okay, why did the chicken cross the road?"

Madison sighed. "To get to the other side?"

Lexi frowned. "How do you know?"

"That joke was made up a hundred years ago," Madison giggled.

"Oh."

The girls looked around a little, then decided to get matching wallets, and left the store.

Madison and Lexi explored Chanel and Prada next. They didn't buy anything there, but it was still fun to look around. At least the two girls didn't act like the tourists at Versace. Madison's father, Devin, always told her to act like a 'young lady' and to practice 'being bored' (i.e. have the discipline to relax and just 'be', instead of whining or complaining). But Madison hated these rules, especially the being-bored one. *Ugh!*

While the girls were walking to their next destination, a boy around their age flew right between them. "Sorry!" he called out. A group of paparazzi yelled out to the boy, not even paying any attention to Madison and Lexi.

"Whoa. He must be an important guy," Lexi commented.

Madison rolled her eyes. "Noooo, the paparazzi just felt like chasing someone."

Lexi's eyes widened. "You think so?"

"Aghhhhh!" Madison walked up to a building and feigned pounding her head on it. "*Gawd*" she thought to herself, "Lexi could be *sooo* out in left field." For sure, Madison was very sharp—most of the classes she was enrolled in were honors classes. Except for chemistry, Lexi's classes were all regular level. And of course Lexi was more of the shopaholic type,

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while Madison liked to read books in her spare time. But there was more to it than that. Lexi was always plenty smart when she needed to be, but could somehow manage to act clueless otherwise—as though she was in her own world, oblivious to everything else. But for all their differences, the two girls were still pretty much alike at the base level. And for sure, they were as close as peas and carrots.

During Madison's internal rant, she accidentally did bump her head on the wall. "Ow," she winced as she wobbled away from the building, Lexi staring at her.

She shook it off and the girls roared out with laughter, continuing on their way. For the girls, the rest of the day was filled with trying on clothes, thinking about what they should buy, and paying for their purchases. The day was drawing to a close when the girls headed back to Brook's Brothers to be picked up by Marion. The store was pretty much empty, and the only other people left were the salespeople (one girl and one boy) who, apparently, were making out behind the counter. *Ugh...*

Madison shook her head in disgust of the couple's PDA (Public Display of Affection), and decided to think about her sixteenth birthday, which was only a month away. *I'll be getting my driver's license soon*, she thought excitedly.

The girls were standing inside by the dressing rooms (Lexi intended to try on a white shirt) when a boy ran inside and to the back, near Madison and Lexi. He looked completely and utterly exhausted. "I think I lost 'em," he whisper-panted, trying his hardest to catch his breath.

"What's wrong?" Lexi asked.

The boy stammered. "I'm, just, uh..."

"Running away," Madison finished for him.

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The boy was now standing up straight, so the two girls saw what he was wearing, which was a large Aéropostale sweatshirt, big Paris Hilton-like sunglasses, and a baseball cap. Madison could tell that this was the same boy that ran past them earlier. She looked at Lexi. *Could this guy be a disguised celebrity?*

Probably...

"Right, uh, how'd you know?"

Madison smiled. "You ran into us earlier. But we're fine, thank you. My name is Madison and this is Lexi. What's your name?"

The boy looked hesitant. "I don't know if I should tell you, because, um....."

Madison looked at Lexi again. *Now could this guy be famous?*

Maybe...

"Please tell us. If it's such a big secret, then I promise to keep it a secret," Madison assured. She was dying to know who the mystery guy could be.

"Yeah," Lexi said. "I promise to keep it a secret too."

The boy sighed. He looked like the world was about to come to an end. "I still don't know. Oh, fine. But don't tell anyone," he warned. "I can get in big trouble!"

Madison and Lexi sighed. "JUST TELL US!"

Madison suddenly wished that she could take back the harsh command. She wanted to know if this guy was a famous movie star but she didn't want to do anything that would make him mad. Madison wondered if Lexi thought the same thing.

The boy jumped after Madison and Lexi yelled. He wasn't afraid. But he was afraid that they would tell his secret to

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someone. Finally, he confessed after taking many deep breaths.

"All right, my name is Jake Ericson."

Lexi giggled. "Sure, you're Jake Ericson." She rolled her eyes and laughed even more.

"Hold on here," Madison said. "You *do* look like him. But take off the glasses and hat first. Then we'll see if you *really are* him." Jake did as he was told, and the girls gasped. "Ohmygod, you *are* him!" Madison shouted. Jake started feeling a little sick. He hoped that the two girls wouldn't blow his cover. He could get in big trouble.

"Please don't tell anyone. If my manager finds out that I'm here he'll freak!"

Jake realized one of the girls, Madison, understood. "We can keep this a secret. I promise that I won't tell anybody. If this could get you in trouble, then I'll keep my mouth shut."

Lexi nodded. "I won't tell either."

Jake started to feel a little bit better. "Thank you for keeping quiet about this. It means a lot to me." He noticed Madison smiling when he said that. Both of the girls were nice to him, and he was happy that they weren't going to tell anyone.

Despite her sincerity, Lexi started giggling nervously, and Madison and Jake looked at her as if she had three heads. Then Lexi became hysterical and out of control. Tears were rolling down her cheeks, and she just wouldn't stop. Luckily, no one was around to witness the crazy, embarrassing scene.

"Lexi, are you okay?" Madison asked. She and Jake stood by her just in case she passed out or something.

Lexi fell back against the wall and pointed to Jake with a shaking finger. "It-t-t-t-t's J-J-J-Jake! That's r-r-r-really J-J-J-

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Jake Erics-s-s-s-son!" She stood up straight and hopped up and down like the Easter Bunny.

The door of the store opened again, and the girls immediately recognized Marion. Jake, afraid of being recognized, quickly put on his hat and his glasses. Lexi kept laughing. The girls walked over to Marion, waving hello (Madison guiding Lexi) and waving goodbye to Jake.

"Be careful," Madison whisper-warned as she and Lexi walked away. "And good luck!"

"Bye!" Lexi called out, still in hysterics. The girls waved once more and left the store, Lexi skipping, Madison simply walking along.

Jake took a deep breath, ran out of the store and across Rodeo Drive, arriving in a parking lot to try to find his bike. Once he found it, he pedaled home.

Jake Ericson was your average seventeen-year-old guy, except he of course was famous. Jake and his parents, Noah and Alyssa, moved to California when Jake was ten, just for his acting. It was cool at first, but after a while, things changed.

After he co-starred in the blockbuster movie, *The Picture Perfect Life*, he realized that being a movie star *wasn't* the life that Jake thought it would be. People were always following him, and he sometimes had to go to parties where he didn't know anyone. The worst part was when he *did* go to parties where everyone was older than him. Most of the time, he couldn't relate to the topics of what the ones around him were talking about.

Now, his parents didn't want Jake to go in public *at all*. He was kept in the huge estate after school and soccer practice, and it really bugged him. His parents feared for his safety and the paparazzi problem. One time, Jake was almost run over by a car when escaping the paparazzi. He and his

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parents called it 'the incident'. It was really scary, but Jake was fine. Yet his parents didn't think so.

Then one day when he was on the verge of dying of boredom, he decided to sneak out of the house. What could be cooler than that?

Why should he worry? He was a smart guy. *Hakuna matata...*

Not exactly.

Ever since 'the incident' the house was filled with cameras so if someone were to sneak in or were caught spying on Jake, the guards would come to intervene. Six people were caught already, with the stories making the newspapers. It was really embarrassing for Jake.

But it's for the best, he thought. *I surely don't want something like 'the incident' to happen again.* He risked it though, every time he left.

Surprisingly, he was never caught sneaking out. The housekeeper came to his room practically every five minutes to check on him. That made him angry, but thankfully, his parents gave Jake a 'Do Not Disturb' sign to hang on his door. It helped him every time when he wanted to leave.

Jake's escape plan was a bit complicated. First, he'd put the sign on his door and wait until the coast was clear. Next, he'd slip out of his room as quietly as he could. Then, he'd tiptoe to the door that led to a balcony not far from his room. Once outside, he'd climb down the ladder of vines. After that, he'd quickly run to the large hedge that blocks the Ericson's property from the street. He'd put on his disguise, climb the hedge, practically fall *off* the hedge, and run to his destination, wherever that might be. He'd do the same thing when he'd return, except backwards. It never failed, never backfired, and as far as Jake was concerned, never would.

TAYLOR ROSE RUSEN

Or would it?

Madison and Lexi spend spring break in Beverly Hills determined to make it their best vacation ever. They meet a movie star, but will have some secrets to keep in trying to balance friendship against the price of fame.

Some Little Secrets

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