

FOREIGN EXPOSURE

THE SOCIAL CLIMBER ABROAD



Lauren Mechling & Laura Moser

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THE SOCIAL CLIMBER ABROAD
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藏书章
by Lauren Mechling

& Laura Moser

G R A P H I A

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To our mothers, for giving us the world.

*With boundless gratitude to
Eden Edwards and Tim Rostron.*

Mimi Schulman,

Even though you're a total weirdo, I am SO glad you came to Baldwin this year. Remember what I told you on the first day, about how the Baldwin scene's needed some social spice forever? Well, it was true, and you sure didn't disappoint! Have an AMAZING summer in Berlin, and if things ever get stressful, just think of me sailing on the Cape. You HAVE to come visit next summer, OK? Lobster and ice cream for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and no better seashell-collecting on earth.

*Hugs and kisses,
Amanda*

Dearest Miriam (ha!),

Hope you don't mind I'm claiming the Brazilian Dance Club's page. I've always felt a certain bond with the group. It's a wonder I haven't joined yet — you should see me at home grooving to my new drumming CD. Magical moments. So . . . you're my oldest old-school friend, the girl I knew way back in the day, the chick who used to try to peek through the crack of the bathroom door and watch me pee in kindergarten. Ten years later and things haven't really changed, have they?

OK, you can kick me now. Ouch!

I was getting used to your ass being in Texas and it's been a little weird having you back in New York. Sometimes it feels like we're strangers and other times like we're related to each other. Relax — I'm about to say something nice. We've had our share of good times this year and I've enjoyed my spot on your living room couch. I hope you survive the summer with your mommy dearest and professor stud muffin and that I didn't make a mistake when I decided to go to the summer studies program at Bennington. When you come home from Berlin and I come back from granola camp, I'm hoping things will be back to normal. And you know exactly what I mean.

Your friend,

Sam

Dear Mimi,

You've been a pleasure to have this year in creative writing. I've so enjoyed watching you blossom from a timid transfer student into the class's resident pistol. You've brought so much insight and constructive feedback to the group discussions, and your writing has never failed to dazzle. I've relished everything you've handed in, from your first essay about your cat to the science fiction story you wrote last week — talk about a kinetic voice! Don't forget to bring a notebook with you everywhere you go this summer.

Kim

P.S. I'll be staying at the Jennings Artist Colony upstate from mid-July until the end of August. Feel free to drop a line if you're so inspired.

Yo,

It's been nice being locker neighbors with you this year. Sorry I'm such a slob. When I cleaned my locker out this week I found a hard-boiled egg from October.

Nastily,

Pete Lombini

P.S. Have we ever even talked before?

Whasssssssssssssssssssssup, Lady?

What am I going to do this summer without our World Civ class? Life isn't worth living if I can't reenact history for my fellow scholars. You have been my everything — my wind, my fire, my beef jerky. I'm going to try to get Ms. Singer to teach The Return of World Civ next year. You in, Ho Chi Minh?

Yours,

Julius Caesar a.k.a. Zoroaster a.k.a. Aristotle a.k.a. Hammurabi a.k.a. the one and only ghettofabulous Arthur Gray

Mimi,

It's been great bumping into you everywhere I go this year (the bakery with my grandmother, art openings, Hot Bagels during assembly, etc.). You sure you're not following me?

Stay cool and don't forget to show up for school next year.

Max-a-million

(That weird thing to the left of this is a drawing I made for you. It started out as the Brooklyn Bridge, but I don't know what it is anymore so don't ask.)

Mimi,

You're such a loser for making me write this. How many times have I told you I don't do yearbooks? Since you insist, here goes the formulaic cheesy note:

I'm glad Baldwin's new girl ended up being so cool, not to mention good-looking and rich. Oh wait — that's me. Haha.

Yearbook rules stipulate that I'm supposed to list all my favorite memories here. Too bad I don't do memories. I'll say this much: I'll miss you and the gang over the summer, but I suspect it'll fly by faster than a private jet.

Let's keep in touch like little stalkers, mkay?

Yours in Eurotrash,

Pia xxx

Queens, isn't exactly my idea of a fun night on the town. Been there, done that. Know what I mean?"

We all laughed, and by the end of the meal, I no longer felt shy around Sam. After we cleared the table, Ed and Harriet settled in the living room to watch the second half of *The Sweet Smell of Success*, which was playing on the one channel to which they had reception. The movie, about a gossip columnist, didn't appeal to me for obvious reasons. Besides, it was too beautiful a night to spend watching TV. I grabbed a couple of flashlights and asked Sam if he'd like to see the lily pond. Harriet and I had cleaned.

"If you're quiet," I whispered when we got there, "you can hear the geese. And there's an owl, too. Sometimes he goes crazy."

We stood stock still, the smell of Sam's Ivory soap lacing the fresh country air. "Hey, I think I heard something," he said. "Shh, don't move." He placed his hand on my back, his fingers pressing lightly against my shirt.

"Yeah," I said in a near-whisper. "I think I heard it, too."

That warm August night, Sam and I seemed to be precisely where we'd left off. Or no, that wasn't exactly right. Because where Sam and I left off was a bad place — riddled with hurt feelings and deceptions about Boris and complications with Viv. And now, here we were. He was still my oldest friend in the world, but I was only just getting to know him.

M,

How weird is it when you're writing in somebody's yearbook and they're sitting right next to you, writing in your yearbook? There's literally two inches of the red staircase's carpeting between us and we could just be talking, but you won't look up from whatever you're writing. I hate writing — it's so stressful. What am I supposed to say? Is this all we're going to have left of each other when we're 99 years old? Sorry so morbid—I've been reading the Jim Morrison diaries.

I have three more yearbooks to sign before the bell rings, so here's a list of this year's highlights, in no particular order.

1. Chilling in my apartment, drinking all of Mom's iced green tea and looking at photography books. Apart from your thing for those Edward Weston pepper pictures, which I'll never understand, you have excellent taste.

2. . . . um . . .

Bell just rang. List kind of sucked, but oh well.

Peace. Love. C ya.

V

*My little dumpling,**

*I'm touched! Merci for saving the back page for me. Empty except for my parting letter and the senior class photo.** Aww, will you look at the 12th graders? They're so excited to be heading off to the land of free love and 584 keg parties a week. Now it's our turn to be "upperclassmen," whatever that means.*

*This year has had its share of ups and downs. The downs: that idiotic journal of yours, my mom's oh-so-ready-for-Life-time-adaptation breakdown, Jess's boy-related freakouts. But the ups by far outnumbered those low points: working together on the paper and having Ulla Lippman*** to amuse us, dancing to Bulgarian techno in my apartment at three a.m., watching self-help talk shows instead of studying for our "interpretative performance vocabulary review," planting organic cabbage you-know-where, hitting the squash courts with Amanda France and her preppy posse, and calling you whenever I was on the verge of a mental meltdown.*

*I don't know what I'll do without you this summer. How unfair is it we'll both be in Europe but in different countries? What if I need your love and guidance? You'd better cave in and get a cell phone. I've come to depend on you.*****

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxLily

**That is, my supermodel-tall little dumpling.*

***Random aside: Is it just me or does Simon Daffow have his eyes scrunched up in every single picture in this book?*

****Check her out at the top right. Don't you feel bad that she didn't get her braces off in time for the picture?*

*****You're the only one who brought me a jumbo bag of peanut butter cups during my mom's nervous breakdown.*

Touch the Monkey

Top three people I'd give anything to spend my summer with:

Boris, the boyfriend I never see

Lily, light of my social life, fire of my lunch hour

Dad

Top three people I'd give anything not to spend my summer with:

Mom

Mom's boyfriend, Maurice

Mom and Maurice together

I USED TO LOOK FORWARD to the last day of school, back when summer was all about improving my backstroke and kicking back with my cat, Simon. But not this year. As the final days of tenth grade ticked by, I watched with growing envy as my friends pranced around in flip-flops and oversize sunglasses. I would've gladly taken summer school, or even one of those military-academy-cum-fat-camps advertised in the back of the *New York Times Magazine*, over the nightmare that awaited me.

Apart from DNA, my mother and I have very little in common. I'm five-eleven and growing; she's well below the national average for women's height and, therefore, has never suffered the humiliation of being called "sir" by inattentive clerks and waiters. Self-consciousness and bewilderment, my specialties, are completely foreign concepts to her. Once, when I asked her if she ever feels insecure or depressed, she chuckled and said she believes in positive thinking. Mom is a psychology professor, and an expert on denial.

Though usually too wrapped up in thinking positively about her own life to notice any developments in mine, she will occasionally descend from her cloud of self-absorption to hurt my feelings — inadvertently, of course. I often remind myself that, deep down, she loves me a lot; she just has a quirky way of expressing it. I let it slide when, after watching me fumble through a duet from *Anything Goes* at my eighth-grade talent show, she mentioned a position paper she'd read on female adolescents' voice changes. When she scrutinized the beautiful gold heels I was wearing to the ninth-grade winter dance and declared that I needed "three extra inches like a hole in the head," I brushed it off. But when, late last spring, she kicked my saintly father out of the house to shack up with Maurice, the roly-poly physics professor she claimed to be her "existential companion," my patience ran out. If she could live without Dad, then she'd have to live without me too.

But in exchange for letting me hightail it to New York to spend this past school year with poor Dad, Mom extracted a promise in return: that I'd spend the summer with her in Hous-

ton. Or so I'd naively assumed. As it turned out, Mom had landed a summer fellowship at the Teichen Institute and expected me to tag along while she conducted spatial-memory experiments on rhesus monkeys.

The Teichen Institute, I should point out, is located in Berlin, a huge European metropolis where I'd know exactly two people: Mom and the aforementioned puffball physicist who'd replaced Dad.

With the school year drawing to a close, I began to dread the experience, and moped around the house accordingly. In the weeks before school let out, Quinn, Dad's delightful darkroom assistant and an honorary member of our family, kept trying to cheer me up by describing Berlin as decadent and fabulous — a city where nobody works or gets up before noon. Quinn was unable to be serious about anything for longer than five seconds, and was a world-class expert at pulling Dad or me out of a funk. One night in late May, he even lured me to the couch and removed a red Netflix envelope from his messenger bag, announcing, "If you don't love Germany after this masterpiece, I'm taking you to Bellevue for a mental health checkup!"

And so I was subjected to *Satan's Brew*, an unbelievably pretentious German movie about a deranged anarchist poet named Walter who's obsessed with a prostitute. Later in the film, Walter becomes convinced he's the reincarnation of a gay nineteenth-century poet and loses interest in the streetwalker. It was a preposterous movie that solidified my suspicion of all things German, but I couldn't tell that to Quinn, who was gasping from start to finish. "This was fun," I said gamely after the movie was over.