

ALL Q,
NO A
More Tales of a
10TH-GRADE
SOCIAL
CLIMBER

by Lauren Mechling
& Laura Moser

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Summary: Reconciled with her friends and enjoying life with her
father in New York City, fifteen-year-old Mimi hopes for a happier
second term at the progressive Baldwin School but soon finds herself
drawn into complications involving the school's finances, her father's
new girlfriend, and her own romantic entanglements.

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To Ben and Anna

**All Q,
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More Tales of a
**10th-Grade
SOCIAL
CLIMBER**

To: Roger Schulman
131 Barrow St., Apt. 1
NY, NY 10014

December 27

Dear Dad,

*Hello from Day One of the tenth-grade girls' mystery vacation. We're supposed to keep the location a secret, but the Puerto Plata postmark might give it away. You would TOTALLY approve—we're at Green Amigas, a collective of women who plant community gardens for underprivileged locals. It's run by Ilana Dominguez, née Feldman, a Baldwin alum who married a Dominican financier she met on a vacation down here. Everyone's very hippie-dippy and zenned to the max. It's a wonder I haven't run into the Upstairs Judys yet! Love and miss you to the moon,
Señorita Mimi Schulman*

To: Rachel Lieber
3412 Sunset Blvd.
Houston, TX 77005

December 28

Rach,

I know, I know, you're probably fuming about my bailing on Texas for Christmas—but trust me, it's a long story. Not sure if I updated you on the massive social catastrophe that befell me at the end of last semester (I doubt it, since I was too humiliated to leave my bedroom, much less discuss it long-distance), but anyway, all's well that ends well, and I'm now in the Dominican Republic, vacationing with the friends I almost lost. I'll tell you all about it when we next see each other. Which might be soon, right? What about the promised NYC visit? C'mon, mama, how could you not? Crazy fun guaranteed, what do you think? Hi to everyone at holiday parties, OK? More soon,

Luuuuuuuv,

Mimi

To: Ariel Schulman
Littlefield Dormitory Box #406
University of Texas
Austin, TX 78712

December 29

Whaddup, sis?

How's my favorite Kappa Kappa sister? Abs still hard as granite? It's bathing-suit land down here in the D.R., and I've dreamed of trading bodies with you several times. Are we really related? Life is not fair. . . . Weather is blissful and scenery all blue skies and tie-dyed sunsets. We spend most days gardening with earnest middle-aged women—you'd hate it. So how was Xmas? Did Mom get all Christian on you now that her Jewish husband is halfway across the country, or was she as annoyingly Freudian as ever? I realize I should send Mom a postcard but I have no desire to address it to Maurice, too, so please just tell them I'm alive and healthy.

XOXO,

Your tubby-tummied little sis,

Mimi

To: Sam Geckman
231 W. 87 St. Apt. 8A
NY, NY 10025

December 30

Sam,

Hi from the winter vacation I almost missed thanks to a certain on-off-on-off redheaded friend of mine, ahem, ahem. Right, so, um, I've started this postcard seven times already and realize there's no witty way of putting it: Last semester kind of (major understatement) sucked for us, but I really hope the next one is better. We're too cosmically connected to wreck such a special friendship. In other news, this vacation is truly awesome—still top-secret, but let's just say, you'd be way impressed with my "shallow" friends. If you dare so much as hint to anyone where this postcard comes from, you and I are through. All over again. Got it? Hope you're having fun in Florida and see you soon.

XOXO,

Mimi

To: Myrtle Lanchester
2401 Bolsover St.
Houston, TX 77005

December 31

Myrtilian,

Howdy from the Dominican Republic, where I'm planting vegetables for world peace. And you thought you knew me inside out. . . . How's my favorite almost-stepsister holding up? Please tell Simon he is the most beautiful, intelligent cat in America—make that the Americas, as I've seen no feline contenders on this island. Congrats on getting all your college apps in. I so hope you choose a school in New York—the men of Gotham await! You would love it down here—many kissable botanists. On my next gardening excursion, you're definitely coming with.

X's and O's,

Mimi

P.S. HI, MOM! I KNOW YOU'RE READING THIS. FINISHED THE BOOK YOU SENT ABOUT THE MENTALLY ILL STREET PEOPLE IN BEIRUT. VERY ILLUMINATING. HOW ABOUT SOMETHING A TAD LIGHTER NEXT TIME?

To: Roger Schulman
131 Barrow St., Apt 1
NY, NY 10014

January 1

El Papá,

Happy New Year! I realize this will reach you long after I do, but I couldn't resist . . . Como estas? Still surviving in a household of one? I hope you've remembered to shower and eat. Apart from my most brutal sunburn ever, everything remains dreamy, perfect, etc. Have dirt under toenails and know how to say lettuce in Spanish. Last night Ilana Dominguez threw an elaborate New Year's Eve bash. Picture moonlight, lapping waves, and a fourteen-piece samba band. Have used all the Polaroid film you gave me so I'll have plenty of pix. I miss and love you so much.

XOXOXO,

Mimicita

P.S. Get this: One of my fellow Green Amigas residents was Upstairs Judy #2's girlfriend "back in the Berkeley days." Did I not call it?!

The Incredible Flying Goat Show Girl

IMAGINE THE TIME YOU COULD SAVE if you didn't have to say goodbye. Not the word *goodbye*, but the hugs, sniffles, and promises to stay in touch that accompany it. I could've mastered Swahili in the hours I spent bidding *adios* to our forty new best friends at Green Amigas. We were on our way out the door when Ilana Dominguez unveiled our sendoff *tres leches* cake, frosted with purple and white squiggles to resemble a head of cabbage. I thought it rude not to stay for a slice, or three.

By the time my friends and I reached the airport, our flight was already boarding, and lines at the check-in counters snaked outside. Lily, the most organized of the group, immediately started freaking out, but Pia, the daughter of Italian diplomats, rose to the occasion. She unapologetically glided to the front of the line and snapped her fingers for us to follow. When we obeyed, the other tourists revolted. "Get in line like everyone else!" one shouted. "Don't you dare!" another threatened. "We've been here since dawn!" I half sympathized with the people we cut, but not Pia, whose emotional intelligence was still playing catch-up with her sky-high IQ. "When will people understand jealousy is *so* unattractive?" she mused wearily, and handed us our boarding cards. We got to the gate with a minute

to spare at a magazine kiosk. "And I mean *one* minute," Pia said. "As in, sixty seconds. I did *not* just make five thousand new enemies so we can miss our flight!"

With that, she disappeared behind a rack of novels in Spanish, leaving the rest of us to browse the newsstand's paltry offerings: inspirational greeting cards, tins of local nuts, and travel-size bottles of mouthwash. Of the several newspapers scattered across the floor, only the *Irish Standard* was in English. It was four pages long and cost more than most annual gym memberships.

"Perfect!" Jess scooped the *Standard* off the dingy floor. Depressed by her boyfriend Preston's long-distance neglect, Jess had spent much of our vacation perusing a gloomy book of Russian short stories, and I was glad to see her moving on to lighter reading material. "I'll get that," Viv said, and tried to take Jess's newspaper.

Jess had allowed our wealthy friends to pay for her week-long vacation, but here she drew the line. She didn't have cash to toss around like our friends did, but she had plenty of pride.

"It's mine," she huffed, "so *I'm* paying for it!"

"They just announced final boarding," Lily said nervously.

"No, seriously, let me buy it," Viv pressed. "It's only money."

"I said NO!" Jess protested. "End of conversation."

"Tick-tock, tick-tock . . ." Lily, genetically anal, was growing more and more impatient.

"C'mon, what part of *final boarding* do you people not get?"

I was admiring two amazing blank notebooks (neither of

which I could justify buying, given the number of unfilled journals I already had at home) when Pia shoved past me with a handful of novels in Spanish. We all watched in awe as Pia snatched both the *Irish Standard*, Viv's package of souvenir lighters, and then, for good measure, the two notebooks I was about to put back on the shelf.

"Does no one listen to poor Lily?" Pia seethed, throwing a stack of Dominican pesos onto the counter. "There's no time for multiple transactions—we have a plane to catch. *Vamos!*"

On the plane, I squeezed into a cramped seat designed to punish lanky 5'11" girls like myself, and waited for the short man in front of me to recline his chair back into my knees. Then, to distract myself, I studied my beautiful new notebooks. The first one—handmade, with a purple cloth cover—brought back fond memories of my bookbinding seminar at The Baldwin School last semester, highlights of which included Ivan Grimalsky's chronicle of his vegetarian Venus flytrap's "fight for life," Arthur Gray's book-burning presentation, and Blowjob Harry's "dinner party cookbook."

My second notebook was flimsy and spiral-bound, with a picture of two goats kissing on the cover and the words THE SANTO DOMINGO NATIONAL SHEEP AND GOAT SHOW. It was high kitsch, and I loved it.

I had special plans for both of my notebooks. To repent for ditching my dad over the holiday, I'd snapped endless pictures with his Polaroid, from shots of the community gardens to the gigantic I MISS YOU, DAD! I'd drawn in the carrot patch. (Dad was a professional photographer, so I knew he'd appreciate my cre-

ative use of his favorite camera.) The next day at school, I would paste these photos in the purple cloth notebook and give it to Dad for New Year's. While the flight attendant explained emergency evacuation procedures, I opened the notebook with the kissing goats and felt the rush of looking at the blank page.

Across the aisle, Jess was skimming the expensive Irish newspaper with a bored expression while Pia appeared entranced by her steamy Spanish bodice-ripper. Viv, between them, had strapped on her monster headphones and was listening to a reggaetón CD she'd purchased on the road one day. Next to me, Lily scribbled on a yellow legal pad, brainstorming for the first winter edition of the *Baldwin Bugle*, the school paper where she worked and I played.

I wrote a column called "Texan in Gotham," billed as an examination of Baldwin culture through an outsider's eyes. At first I'd enjoyed this excuse to learn more about my new school, but lately I'd struggled to come up with a new story idea every two weeks. It's hard to keep that outsider's perspective when you're more on the inside every day. Writing about my winter break would prove even more challenging, given the hush-hush nature of our Green Amigas experience. Baldwin had a weird, cultish tradition shrouded in secrecy and intrigue that dated back two decades. Every year, the most popular sophomore girls embarked on a trip to an undisclosed location and the next year elected another group to follow in their footsteps. Speculations about the nature of this trip ran rampant, and most Baldwinites (including, I admit, myself) pictured something five-star, like a