

Are We Any Better?

by
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Day One

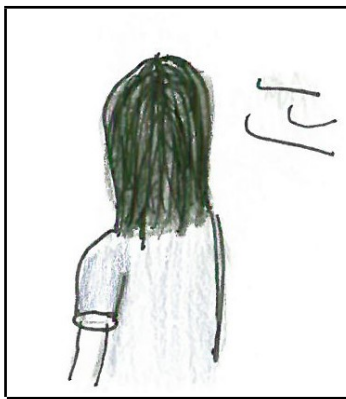
Brrriinnnggg!!

The cool October breeze blew through my shoulder length black hair as I made my way to the Annex.

“Good morning, Ophelia!” Mme Plausen’s cheery voice reminded me of daffodils, and I’m not quite sure why.

I went to my hook to hang my bag up before heading into class and taking a seat at my desk. Bella and Maddie – the best ten-year-olds in the world – were already sitting beside me. Bella has blonde hair that reaches halfway past her back, and green eyes. Maddie has dirty blonde hair that is always in a ponytail, and she is very tall. The three of us sit in the back of the class, which is good, because it means that madame trusts us. Although, we do have one problem with where we sit, and that problem, is the Zara’s.

The Zara's are three friends that are practically the opposite of Maddie, Bella and I (aka, The Believers). When we are practicing cross country running, the Zara's are fussing over their nail polish. When we are reading, the Zara's are gossiping and passing notes. So, as I said, the opposite.



I am glaring at the back of Trish's head where her hair, that looks exactly like mine, is resting on her shoulders. Our hair is identical, but that is where the similarity ends. My eyes are the colour of the ocean, and hers are a deep brown. Our clothes are nothing alike, hers are carefully selected and colour-coated, and mine are the first clean things I can find. My skin is pale and covered in freckles and her olive skin has not a single freckle and is always covered in makeup. Trish is the leader of The Zara's and it is very obvious.

I could see Trish scribbling something onto a sheet of paper, then she ripped it in half and handed it to the other two Zara's, Amber and Claire. Amber has wavy red hair and is taller than Maddie. Claire has bobbed blonde hair and is pretty short. It's funny because they are all different heights, hair colours and hair lengths.

Trish gets up to sharpen her pencil and the other two follow her like always. They're wearing their 'Blondie', 'Brunette', and 'Redhead' cropped sweaters with ripped bleached jeans. I roll my eyes. They are dressing the same, again.

As soon as they sit down Madame starts writing out our schedule on the whiteboard. I look over at Bella and Maddie who are busy writing in their daytimers. I get up to fill my water bottle. I snatch the note off Claire's desk casually and I head over to the sink. When I get back to my desk Maddie pinches me for the note. Maddie hurts people often, not in a mean way, just in a Maddie way.

I glare at Maddie and then unfold the note and laugh. It said, “Mad is wearing such odd vets today.”

If you are wondering what “vets” is, I don’t blame you. ‘Vets’ is the Zara’s way of saying clothes. Vetements' is French for clothing, so the Zara’s shortened it. They also shortened Maddie to Mad. So, what they are really saying is Maddie’s clothes are un-fashionable. You can see why we don’t agree with the Zara's on many topics.

I show Bella and Maddie the note. Maddie snorts and Bella gets up to put it in the garbage. The Zara’s sit down just as Madame steps away from the calendar.



The calendar reads ‘Politics! Snack, Politics! Lunch, Politics!’ The class groans. I slump back in my chair. Politics are usually Madame telling us about democracy, which I don’t mind, but I will mind if we have to do it for the entire day. Madame frowns at the classes groan.

“Rude! I guess our day of just speaking English just flew out the window.”

Now she has the class's attention. A few of the kids shake their heads rapidly. Madame gives the class a thumbs up, “Alright! Politics for today is not like our usual politics class. What we are doing today is... drum-roll please... class president!”

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“Class president? What?! Cool!” Whispers erupted throughout the class.

“Okay simmer down,” Madame said, smiling. “Class president means that over the next few days, people who are running for president will work on their speeches, while the other students are reading. You will have two days to work on your speech, another day to perform, and on the fourth day, the students will vote. Then we will declare the president after lunch. The candidate will pick two people today, one to be their vice-president and one to be their secretary. Now! Who would like to run?”

My hand shot into the air. So did Trish’s. Two other students raised their hands as well. One of them was Becca. Becca is what we call an admirer, meaning she copies the Zara’s. She is an A+ student and she has blonde hair, brown eyes, and a lot of freckles. Personally, I don’t see why Becca isn’t part of the Zara’s.

The other kid with their hand raised was Bruce, a tall-ish, talkative kid who is part of the soccer kids.

“Okay, Trish, Becca, Bruce and Ophelia,” Madame said as she checked our names off a list. “Pick your partners!”

I pick Maddie and Bella, Trish picks the Zaras. Becca picks two admirers, and Bruce chooses two soccer kids.

“Good job guys, time for recess!”

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At the end of the day Bella said, “How are we going to beat the Zaras?” sounding panicked.

“I don’t care about winning, just participating,” I packed up my backpack and started to walk out the door.

Maddie shoves me playfully, “You sound like a teacher!”

I shrug, “It would be fun to beat the Zara’s.”

Maddie smiles.

“Au revoir, mes amies!” I start to prance home, excited to start my speech.

Day Two

When I arrive at school, something seems up. The Zara's are sitting in a circle with a few admirers, whispering.

When the circle split the admirers stare at us in disgust. The Zara's glare at us.

I lean over to Bella and ask, "What is that about?"

"Gossip."

"True, or false?"

At that moment, Maddie sticks her head into our huddle, "Probably false," she says, sticking out her tongue.

“Hmm.” I nudge the girl sitting beside us, “Can I please borrow a pencil?”

“I don’t believe you!”

I turn back and poke Bella, “What was that?!” I ask with concern.

“Trish must have talked to her.”

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At recess, I sit down on the steps and shake my head, “We need to do something about the Zara’s.”

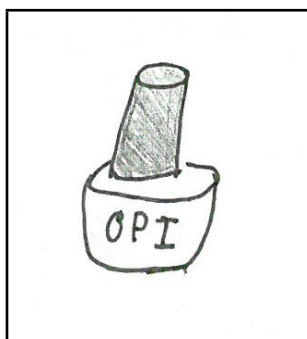
Maddie’s eyes light up, “Like what?”

“I think I might just have the right thing,” I say, grinning mischievously.

I walk up to Bella and ask her if she has any nail polish remover. She has a funny look on her face as she reaches into her pocket and pulls out a mini bottle of clear liquid.

“Thanks,” I grin. As I run off, I yell back, “I’ll return it!”

Then, I go up to a supervisor to get a bathroom pass. I head into the classroom quickly and grab an empty nail polish top coat container



out of Trish’s desk, and hop to the bathroom.

In the bathroom, I open the top coat container and pour a bit of the nail polish remover into the

container. I walk back outside humming, dropping the container back in its place before I leave.

I give Becca back the nail polish remover before rejoining my friends.

“What did you do?” Bella asks.

I tell them what I have done just as the bell rings.

About halfway through silent reading, we hear a shriek in front of us.

“My nails!”

I glance over to see Trish looking at her now half painted nails with disgust.



“Trish! You shouldn’t be painting your nails during reading!” Madame Plausen says, frowning at Trish.

I try to hide my smile behind my book. Maybe this will be the first step in trying to get my fellow peers to realize that they don’t need to vote for the Zara’s just because they look fancy.

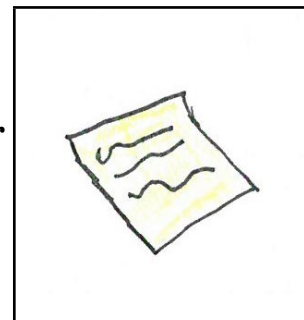
Maddie leans in close enough to whisper, “Another day, another dollar.”

Day Three

Today I come to school prepared, and it comes in handy. When I sit down everything seems ordinary. The Zara's don't have a crowd of people around them like they did yesterday, so I assume that today is going to be a gossip free day.

Madame tells us to work on our speeches because it is our last day. I pull out our script and look at all the election signs, then I get to work.

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see Trish handing a note to the kid that sits in front of them. The kid looks at it and laughs. Then she points to the Believers, (us), with a questioning look on her face. Trish nods at her and the kid starts laughing even harder. Then she passes the note to her other friends.



I watch as the note makes its way around the class. Everyone who reads it laughs. My hands ball up into fists. Bella glares and Maddie grinds her teeth as we watch the class open the note.

* * * * *

At recess I grab my supplies and tell Bella and Maddie to meet me at the fort. The fort is a hole in a bush at the side of the school. We have made it like a living room, complete with cushions and a stump for a table.

Moments after I raced into the fort and emptied my supplies, Bella and Maddie burst in.

“What’s the emergency?” Maddie pants, out of breath.

“The Zara’s are gossiping, again,” I say as I start to set up my supplies.

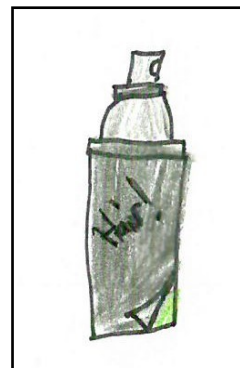
“I am aware. What are we going to do about it?” Bella says as she sits down on one of the cushions.

“Watch.” I pull out a bottle of firm hairspray, and remove the label. I pick up a bottle of green hairspray from last Halloween and remove that label as well. Then, I take out some glue and cover the green hairspray container, carefully placing the firm hairspray label atop the bottle.

Maddie and Bella stare with wonder as I pack up the leftover supplies. Then I thrust the bottle of hairspray into Maddie’s hand.

“Can you please ask for a bathroom pass, then go into the class and put this inside of Trish’s desk?”

“Yes Ma’am!” Maddie is off in a second.



* * * * *

I sit down at my seat and rub my hands together in excitement.

“Time for gym!”

My head snaps up when I hear Madame’s voice. The class shuffles to the front of the room, just as I hear a hairspray can clinking in front of me.

I freeze, before turning around slowly.

Trish is muttering, “I have to reapply my hairspray so my hair doesn’t come out during gym.”

I watch with an amused smile on my face as Trish expertly applies a layer of my secret formula to her hair.

I join the back of the line and Trish stood behind me. When we arrived at the gym, the teacher stares at Trish with wide eyes.

“Trish! Your hair!!” The teacher is blinking so fast you could have sworn that there was something in her eye.

“What about my hair?” Trish pulls out her compact mirror, takes one look at her green hair and screams, “AHHH!!!”

Day Four

I spent a bit more time getting ready today and actually put on nice-ish clothes because today is speech day, and I want to make a good impression.

When I get to school I revise my speech with Bella and Maddie. Trish shows up wearing a maroon crop-top with a fox on it, and ripped shorts.

“Okay, math time!” Madame said.

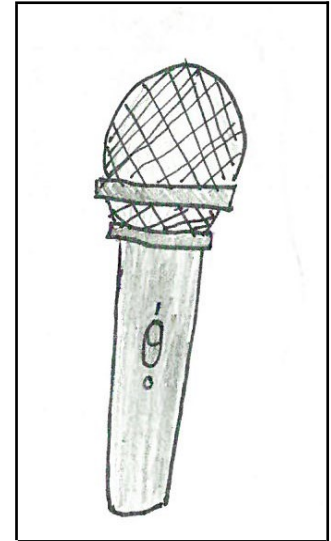
‘What? I thought speeches would come first today.’ The whole class looked at Madame skeptically.

“I’m kidding!” Madame says looking very pleased with herself.

“Speeches. Bruce, you are first!”

Bruce went up to the front of the stage with an unbelievable show of courage. He makes a short speech about how we need longer recess and how soccer kids need a soccer break every hour. When he finishes the class claps respectfully. Then his secretary and vice president do a short speech about the same thing.

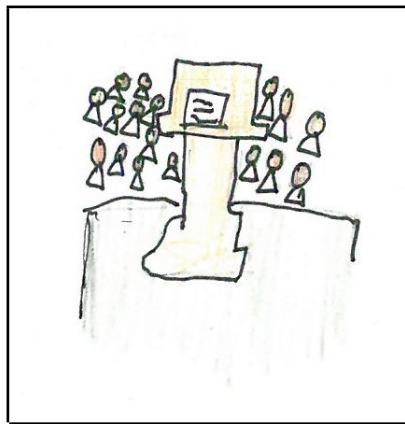
Next, Becca goes up and blows the class away. Her speech is quite inspiring and thoughtful. My hands start to sweat, getting my paper wet. Becca's vice president and secretary make their speeches as well, not as inspiring as Becca's but still good.



Then it was Trish's turn. She walks up on stage, not looking an ounce nervous. Her speech is all about improving the class image and starting a school fashion magazine. I don't know what the rest of the class thinks, but I think it's a bunch of bologna. Amber and Claire get up and do something along the same lines as Trish.

I realize just how nervous I am and have to go to the bathroom, bad. I do the sign language sign for bathroom, and leave.

When I get back, it's my turn. My heart is pounding. I take a deep breath, wipe my hands on my pants and walk to the front of the room. I take another deep breath, and begin my speech.



“Hi everybody! I know most of you probably just think about me as the book-ish person in the back who never gets along with the Zaras. That is all true, but I want you to know that if I get elected, I will try my best to get extra learning programs that will make school fun for everyone. I want you to vote for somebody whose opinions you agree with. So if you don't like school, I wouldn't vote for me. Anyways, I guess what I am trying to say is, don't vote for someone who you think is cool or someone who could make you less popular or something like that. I think you should vote for someone who shares your values. Over the past two days I've done some pranks that I thought might help you realize that you don't have to vote for someone just because they are popular. But then I reflected on what I had done and really asked myself, 'Are we any better?' I don't know the answer to that, but tomorrow you will tell us with your vote. Thank you!”

Day Five

When I arrive at school, the class looks like a polling station with voting screens and a desk that Madame is sitting behind with a class list in front of her.

“Come on up to vote! Candidates, take a seat on those chairs.”

Madame gestures to four groups of three chairs.

I sit down on one of the chairs, rubbing my hands together in anticipation. Every time somebody smiles at me before they vote, it gives me the feeling that they are voting for me.

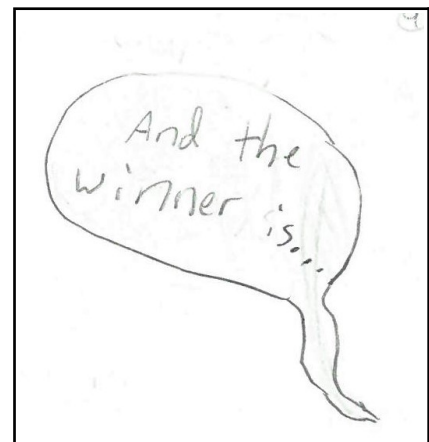
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I came in from lunch recess, terrified. This is it. Madame tallied the votes over lunch. The moment that the past five days led up to is here. I sit down at my desk and pull out a book. I can't concentrate on reading, so my eyes scan the room, tallying people who could have possibly voted for me.

Maddie leans over to me with her fingers crossed, "Fingers crossed for you!" she says.

"Thanks!" I smile weakly.

"Hello everybody!" Madame's grin spreads from ear to ear. "This is the moment we have all been waiting for. The moment that one of you will become president of room 302. Without further ado, the winner of Room 302 presidential election is... drum-roll please... Becca!"



It took a moment for what Madame had said to sink in, then I feel a mixture of emotions flood in. First I am sad and disappointed. Then I realized that Trish also has not won. ‘*Wait, TRISH DID NOT WIN!*’ I say to myself.

“Whoopie!” I realize that I have shouted that outloud. “Sorry, I know I did not win!” I say as I relax back in my chair. But I can not keep the smile off my face. Bella and Maddie stare at me like I am nuts.

After many people had congratulated Becca I went up to her and said, “I’m really glad you won.”

Becca looked at me confused, “What do you mean? Didn’t you want to win?”

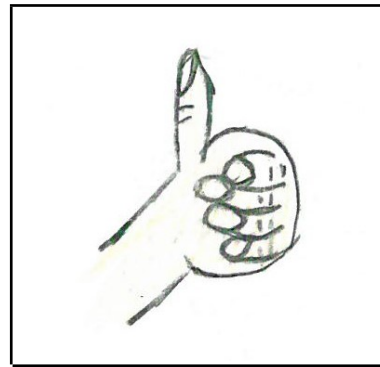
“I did, but I’m just glad Trish didn’t win! Plus, your speech was inspiring.”

“Cool.” Becca gives me a thumbs up as I walk away from her and up to Trish.

“Since neither of us won, are we equals now?” I think my request catches Trish off guard.

“Sure, but we are still rivals.”

“Deal,” I said, giving her a thumbs up.



I head back to my desk, smiling. I guess

playing pranks doesn't win you an election, but it can make you an equal with a group like the Zara's.

The end.