

# THE CLIQUE

A NOVEL BY  
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THE BLOCK ESTATE

THE KITCHEN

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“Massie, wipe that confused look off your face,” Massie’s mom, Kendra, said. “It’s really very simple—you’re not going.”

Massie Block flicked the tiny bell that dangled from her gold charm bracelet over and over again. The hollow pings were the only sounds she could make, unless of course she wanted to be accused of “interrupting” by her annoyingly polite mother, which she didn’t. She just wanted to win the argument they were having.

“But I have plans and it would be *rude* if I broke them,” Massie said. “Right? I mean, haven’t you always told me to ‘honor my engagements’?” She made air quotes just to remind her mother that the rule was hers in the first place.

Massie looked to her father, William, for backup, but he just sipped his tea and continued reading the latest copy of *Westchester* magazine.

“I told you about this weeks ago,” Kendra said. She spoke very slowly and enunciated every word, in much the same way she talked to Inez, their live-in housekeeper. “Your father has been good friends with Mr. Lyons since college. They are moving to Westchester all the way from Florida so that Mr. Lyons can work for him. And while they are looking for a home of their own, they will be living in our guest-

house. And as our daughter it is important that you're here to greet them when they arrive."

"Why?" Massie narrowed her eyes. "They're Dad's free-loading friends, *not mine*."

Kendra shot her husband a desperate look across the table. William stayed focused on the magazine.

"Well, they'll be your friends soon enough." Kendra said. "Claire is starting the seventh grade on Tuesday too, so you should have plenty to talk about."

"What? Like math?" Massie snapped.

"You can always invite her to join in on your plans," Kendra suggested. "Then you won't miss out on anything."

"Impossible." Massie shook her head. "We've had these appointments for weeks. We can't just call up the spa and add another person at the last minute." Massie looked away. "Not that we'd want to," she said under her breath.

"Then it's settled," Kendra said. "Inez will have brunch on the dining room table tomorrow at 1:15 P.M. Don't be late."

Massie turned and stomped out of the kitchen. Her black pug, Bean, scurried across the floor, trying to keep up without getting too close to Massie's deadly three-inch mules. When they got to the staircase, Massie leaned down and scooped up the puppy with one hand.

Normally she took her heels off before climbing the steps because of the "delicate high-gloss finish on the wood." But considering the circumstances, she chose to leave them on. Every floor-scutting step would pay her mother back for

destroying the Labor Day plans she had with her three best friends.

When she got to the second floor, Massie kicked off her shoes and padded across the plush carpet straight into her bedroom. And slammed the door behind her.

“Don’t slam!” came Kendra’s voice over the intercom. Massie looked at the white speaker by the bed and rolled her eyes.

Everything in her room was white: the leather chaise by the bay window, the sheepskin rug, the painted brick walls, the dozen fresh tulips, and her flat-screen Mac. Her friends called it the iPad. She’d designed it that way after she stayed in the presidential suite at the Mondrian in Los Angeles. The only color in the enormous hotel room had come from the decorative green apple in the middle of the white marble coffee table. She loved how crisp and orderly everything looked.

But just the other day she’d read in a British gossip magazine that purple was the official color of royalty, which explained the brand new mauve Calvin sheets on her bed. She’d been hoping to buy more in the “queen’s color” during her Labor Day shopping spree, but that was no longer an option.

Massie lifted her dog in the air so their eyes could meet. “Bean, tell me this isn’t happening.”

Bean blinked.

“Missing out on tomorrow could stunt my social growth for the *rest* of the year,” Massie said.

Bean licked Massie's thin wrist. She loved the taste of Chanel No. 19.

"Everyone will have a fresh batch of inside jokes I won't even *get*. I'll have to smile like a good sport while everyone laughs and says, 'Oh, you just *had* to be there.'" Massie shook her head vigorously as if her mind was an Etch A Sketch that could erase thoughts she didn't like.

"And you know Dylan will buy the YSL lip markers I put a 'yes' sticker on in *Lucky*," she said. "And you wanna know *why* this is happening?" Massie continued. She didn't wait for Bean's reaction. "So I can meet some girl from Orlando who's going to be living here for a *year*. I mean, what's the urgency? She's not going anywhere." Massie paused and searched her brain for a reasonable explanation. "Unless of course she has a life-threatening illness."

Bean yelped.

"And if she does . . ." Massie let out a heavy sigh. "Why should I get attached?"

Massie ripped up the itinerary she made for her friends that detailed everything she had planned for their day of beauty. She stood above her trash can and let the scraps of paper fall through her fingers like snowflakes. She could see that words like *spray tan*, *eyebrow wax*, *aroma (therapy* had been torn away), and *Bergdorf's* were still intact.

Massie collapsed on her bed and stretched her arm toward her night table. She grabbed her cell and hit "1" on

her speed dial. The girl on the other end picked up after the first ring.

“Heyyy,” Alicia said

“Hold on, I’ll get Dylan,” Massie said.

“Kay .”

Massie punched in “2” and pressed Send.

“Dyl?”

“Yeah.”

“Hold on, I’ll get Kristen.”

Massie pressed “3.”

“Hey, Mass,” Kristen said.

“Hey, Alicia and Dylan are here too,” Massie said.

“What’s up?” Kristen asked. She sounded nervous, like she was about to get blamed for something she didn’t do.

“I can’t go with you guys tomorrow,” Massie blurted.

“Yeah, right.” Dylan snorted.

“No, I’m serious. You’re not going to believe this, but I have to—” Massie paused and reconsidered her next words. “I have the flu.” Which came out sounding like, “I hab da flu.”

“Gawd, you sound awful,” Kristen said.

“Yeah, maybe we shouldn’t go,” Dylan offered. “We can come over and take care of you instead.”

“What? Not go?” Alicia snapped. “I mean, Massie, what *exactly* is wrong with you? Maybe we can help.”

“Feber. Headache. Stuffed up doze, you doh, duh usual.” Massie added a sniff and an “uuugggghhh” for effect.

“Dylan’s right. We’ll bail,” Kristen said. “It won’t be the

same without you. Who's going to squeeze my hand when I get my eyebrows waxed?"

"And who's going to tell me if I look fat when I try stuff on?" Dylan asked.

"The mirror," Alicia said.

Kristen let out her famous raspy, phlegm-filled cackle.

"Massie, please don't leave me alone with them," Dylan joked.

Massie smiled with relief. They wanted her with them. They *needed* her with them. And that, as always, was all that mattered. But she also knew how quickly they could change their minds.

"You all go. But I want to hear every detail of what happened." Massie momentarily forgot her sick voice. "Every single one."

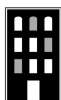
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