

Girls don't wear dog tags. Boys do. Girls wear necklaces, bracelets and all that frilly stuff. I guess you might say that I'm "one of the boys", but that wouldn't be true. For a long period of time all I wanted to be was a popular girl. Wear expensive pearls instead of my grandpa's war dog tags, wear perfume instead of *JASON: Scentsless Deodorant* and most importantly, wearing skirts and high heels instead of torn jeans and tennis shoes. Little did I know that this change would ruin my first year of high school.

Georgia Hemingway. Elegant, flabbergasting and most definitely beautiful. She was like the alpha of the dog pack and everyone else was an omega. Everyone wanted to be like her. I wanted to be like her too, more than anything. I realized that on one day when I was sitting on the cold, steel bleachers during Georgia's cheer practice with Vick and Lily. We were remonstrating Georgia about her dominancy with her apathetic cheerleading squad. "Why does she try so hard?" Vick questioned, while watching Georgia scolding one of her teammates. "I don't know. She probably wants to be looked at like a mother hen." I add. Lily giggles and makes a chicken noise. It's so blustering that Georgia whips her faultless hair and turns toward us. Her narrow hawk eyes focus on us. Giving us an "I-hate-you-guys-so-much-so-shut-the-hell-up" look. She turns back and continues to practice. We snicker again. She doesn't give us her sinister look this time. I clutched my grandpa's war dog tags and felt the rough engravings of the old tag. I looked at Georgia again. For a temporary moment, I pondered about what life would be like if I was like her. Having everything at the palm of my hands, having lines of boys begging to ask me out, and just to have people look up at me. See me as powerful and bold. "Umm... Janie? Are you coming?" Lily questioned, while waving her marker-stained hands in my face. My pondering snapped away as quick cat being put in an ice-cold bath. "Yeah... I'm coming." I followed Vick and Lily off the bleachers while still staring at Georgia. Still thinking about her life compared to mine.

"Since when did Janie Nixon, captain of the field hockey team, become interested in cheerleading?" Lily asked remarkably. She had a bleak frown on her face and her eyes looked

dark. "It just sounds cool, I guess," I answer trying not to look abashed, "I mean... we don't have field hockey until spring." Maybe offering up a reason would help, but she just snorted rudely,

"Janie, we don't have time for this! You can't hang out with those girls!"

"Who says I am?"

"I know you are! You're going to leave us! Just like Gemma did!"

For a second, neither Lily nor I said anything. I slammed my locker shut and walked past Lily slowly. I glanced back at her. She stood there firmly. Arms crossed, leg slanted and an expression on her face that instantly told me that she meant business. She turned away too, and strutted to her next class. I felt alien once I turned away again. I had never gotten in a fight so dramatic like that with Lily before. *Whatever*, I thought fearlessly, *she'll apologize for acting like that tomorrow. How long could naïve, sweet Lily be mad at me?* It turned out to be a long while. For over two weeks Lily wouldn't talk to me. The eccentric thing about it was that I didn't care anymore. I had new friends. For the first time in forever, no one could tell me no, and that is just the way I like it.

It turns out that Lily replaced me too. She replaced me with the new goalie named Hollie. I didn't even dare to sign up for field hockey; it would ruin my charismatic nails that I just got done at *U.S Nails*. It would also ruin the acceptability that I have earned over the past three months. Reputation is hard work. I had to get rid of everything I used to own. My *Adidas* sneakers was boxed away as well as my all my "old" clothes. Even my ancient dog tags got thrown into a bland, brown storage box. I was kind of in a melancholy mood when I had to shove all my childhood possessions into a crummy, old box, but I got over it. This was the start of my new life. Janie Nixon, the cheerleader. Janie Nixon who was about to win the cheer competition in a couple of minutes.

"Remember," Georgia growled in a controlling tone, "Sinclair High's entire reputation depends on your guys' performance." The cheerleading team was in the dreary, damp girls' locker room at Lincoln High. All of the girls' hands were in the middle of the orange-and-blue flock heaped around Georgia. "Okay?" Georgia asked.

"Yep" we all answered.

"123!"

"PHARAOHS"

The team hooted and jumped then ran out the door to the gym. I trailed behind, picking up all the orange hair-ties that fell from the older girls. The gym was mammoth and loud.

"PHARAOHS, PHARAOHS, PHARAOHS!" The crowd screamed extravagantly. We all stood linear to the audience and waved as if we were princess during our coronation day. Our Egyptian, jeweled mascot ran out from the pit. I scanned the crowd. No Lily. No Vick. I looked down for a moment and thought about it all. Lily, field hockey, Vick and the poor dog tags. The dog tags that my grandpa gave me as my last birthday present to me from him. I pushed it all back. *Focus Janie*, I thought, *focus*. The competition was full of fury and skill. It lasted two long hours, but the Sinclair Pharaohs brought home an a gleam, aureate trophy. "Congrats girls! We did it!" Georgia announced in the bus. An ocean full of cheers rose from the smelly bus seats. Georgia ran down the aisle high-fiving everyone. We sang songs all night until we were dropped off at the school. The sky sprinkled rain lightly as I made my way into the building. A low clap of thunder rumbled in the ashen sky. It was nine-thirty already. Way past my bedtime, but wow was it worth it! "You were totes fab J!" Lena commented while applying indigo mascara. I smiled. "Really?" I asked "You think so?"

"Definitely"

"Wow, thanks"

"You're welcome"

I just stood there, absentmindedly staring at Lena. She didn't remind me of Lily at all. Lena purses her lips and looks at me. The expression on her face is utter confusion. "Why are you staring at me?" she asks in an alien tone. I stop thinking about Lily, and focus on Lena. "Oh... Sorry." I reply wearily. She frowns displeasingly then leaves the room. The thunder outside crackles then whips into a flabbergasting BOOM! The lights in the dreary bathroom flicker. I can hear the heavy rain thunder down from the extremely loud thunder clouds. I checked my make-up in the mirror. It's flawed. Go figure. *I'll never fit in with the girls. I'm not a girl. I'm one of the boys;* I thought depressingly, *I should stop this now.* A loud thunder claps again and the wind howls like a wolf at the moon. Theresa runs in, "C'mon J! There's severe storms watch!" she pants. The dark sky rumbles on. I run outside with her. The thick rain was pelting us. We ran to the salvation we call the bus and sit down as quickly as possible. I look out the dirty window. I felt like the rain. Being brought up again to the clouds only to be put down again to the ground. I felt so useless. I pulled out my iPhone and looked through my pictures. All the way at the end of the stream was a picture of Lily and me. We were in our field hockey uniforms, and we were hugging. My dog tags were still around my neck and my face wasn't bombarded with *Covergirl* cosmetics. I felt a tear roll down my cheek. It was time to apologize for being such an idiot to Lily. I put my phone back in my duffle bag and leaned against the wet window. I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

The next day was Saturday, and I was literally dying to call Lily. But, I spent all day with Kathy, Beth and Terry at the mall. Apparently, "Wanna go to the mall with us J?" isn't a question. It is an order. We went through all sorts of frilly shops, *Vera Bradley*, *Sephora*, *Victoria's Secret* and frankly, I've had enough. "Wanna go to *Hot Topic*?" Terry asked while blowing on her be-dazzled hot pink nails. "Totes girl!" Beth replied. Kathy just nodded with an unsatisfied frown on her face. 'How 'bout you J," Terry asked, "You wanna go?" I didn't reply.

She bent over to look in my eyes. "Um.... Hello?" she snootily snapped. "I... guess." I didn't have the courage to actually say no. I trudged behind all the girls. My pathetic high-heels were giving me an ache. I slipped them off as quickly as possible and ran up to the other girls. Terry had sprayed way, way, WAY too much *Bath & Body Works: Beautiful Day*. I coughed. She glared. "Don't give me germs!" she groaned. She walked to the side and the other girls followed in unison. I stopped at *Wet Seal*. The black-and-white light called me. "I'll be in *Wet Seal* you guys!" I hollered from the bright store entrance. "Whatever!" Beth yelled back, with a mean giggle following. I walked into the store. It was big and wide, not like many stores in the mall. I walked around, felt some of the soft clothes, and then walked to the dressing room. I looked in the mirror. My autumnal, auburn hair looked great with that blow-dry I just got, but I looked even better when my hair was in two braids. The way Lily and I wore our hair. I walked back to the clothing department and purchased an old, faded jean jacket. Maybe it will boost my confidence. I left the store slowly and explored shops on my own. Shops that I want to go to. Shops that Lily would want to go to. Pretty soon, it's late. Four o'clock. I take out my iPhone and browse under "contacts". Then, I find the name I was looking for. Lily Moretti. I take a deep breath and press "call".

"I'm sorry for being a complete and utter jerk Lily." I confess while sitting on Lily's bunk bed. She's sitting next to me. Her strawberry-blonde hair is covering her face. I know she's upset. She has every right to be. She huffs, "I accept your apology." she pauses. She looks up. A diminutive smile creeps along her freckled face.

"Can we be friends again?"

"Of course we can!"

I hug her and she hugs back. Then she punches me in the arm. "First things first, let's get rid of that *horrible* outfit!" she exclaims. I call my mom later to ask if I could spend the night. I had a

lot of things to catch up on with Lily since I've been gone. The only thing I had to really worry about was what I was going to tell the cheerleading squad. Specifically, Georgia Hemingway.

I went back to the storage place later. I picked up everything that I threw away. My rag-tag jeans, my smelly sneakers and yes, my sacred dog tags. I put them around my neck and once again, felt the engravings. I remembered sitting in the hospital room feeling them on my grandpa's neck. I remember him stroking my head, "You really love these dog tags, don't you Jay-Jay?" I giggled and replied, "Yes!" He took them off his neck and smiled. "I don't know how much longer I'll be here Jay-Jay. On Earth, I mean," he looks at me, "I need someone extremely brave and worthy to wear them while I'm gone." I cock my head. He chuckles again and places them around my neck, "You keep them safe for me Jay-Jay," he says scruffing my head, "I know you will." I hug him and fell asleep. A week later, grandpa leaves Earth. I come back to the present. I hold them again and remember what grandpa said, "I need someone extremely brave and worthy to wear them while I'm gone." I keep repeating that as I put all my stuff back into the trunk and drive away.

Monday was the day that I, Janie Nixon, walked into school as myself. The Janie Nixon that wore dog tags, the Janie Nixon that wore worn-out tennis shoes, and the Janie Nixon who *loved* hotdogs. Not a cheerleader and definitely not a fashionista. I'm sure if my grandpa could see me now, he would be marveled. He would see me wearing his dog tags with pride, because after all, girls *do* wear dog tags.