Keeping Secrets and Telling Lies

A Short Story

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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The goal of my senior thesis is to get a better perspective on myself as a writer. I wanted to compose a piece of short fiction in which I gave my full effort writing and revising to see where I stand as a writer. The story that follows, "Keeping Secrets and Telling Lies," represents for me what I wanted to achieve. In writing this piece I used what I had learned as an English major though all of my writing both creative and expository. To incorporate my major in secondary education, both the subject and intended audience are middle school age students. Following the piece, I have included a reflection on the process of writing to better help myself understand my writing and this project.
“Bleah.”

I tossed my book on the desk. SSR had just finished in Mrs. Anders’s 7th period English class. Usually this was my favorite part of the day, but after reading what someone had done to my Nancy Drew, I could barely contain my disgust.

“Problem, Sarah?” my best friend Stacy asked, letting her long brown hair fall out of the bow she used to keep it tame during SSR.

“This is awful.” I held up the book I had been reading.

“Nancy Drew on Campus?” she frowned. “So what’s the matter with that? Isn’t Nancy allowed to go to college?”

“Yeah, but she’s all mushy about boys and I’m almost halfway through and there’s no mystery!”

“A Nancy Drew with no mystery? I thought there was like a law that said wherever Nancy went, someone had to steal art or kidnap her father.”

“You’re funny, Stac’!” I shot back. “But really, she’s got like 10 new friends and a new boyfriend and what happened to River Valley...”

“Sarah.”

I was cut off by Mrs. Anders who was staring at me along with the rest of the class. Oops...

“Although I’m sure you’re discussing literature, Sarah, it is time to get out your notebook. You can tell me all about your book in your journal at the end of class.”

Well, I had been discussing literature, but I wasn’t one to argue with everyone staring at me. I self consciously pushed my short brown hair behind my ear. I’d gotten it cut way too short a few weeks ago and I’m sure they were thinking how terrible it looked.

“Sorry,” I muttered and reached under my desk for my English folder. It wasn’t the first time I’d gotten into trouble for talking in class. I liked Mrs. Anders, but she could get so touchy about a little conversation. I glanced at Stacy, but she was putting away her Sweet Valley High book and acting like she didn’t know me.

I made it through twenty minutes of lecture about newspaper editorials. It was Friday, and I could put up with a lecture on Fridays.

It made me think of how Nancy Drew was now a newspaper reporter instead of a real detective. I mean, really, why did Nancy need to go to college? She was already smart. And they were always saying how she was turning down payment for her detective work. If she’d have let them pay her, she could have kept working and not have had to mess around with college.

It’s not that I have anything against college. I plan to go myself, but then again, I’m not half the detective Nancy is. Once I helped Stacy find her lost gym shoes, but she’d just left them in her dad’s truck, and it wasn’t exactly uncovering a corporate
take-over. Mysteries just don’t happen at Northbury Middle School, or in Midbury at all for that matter.

The last ten minutes of class were for journal writing. I did as Mrs. Anders suggested and vented my frustration over the college series of Nancy Drew:

- I am just so mad about what’s happening to Nancy Drew! In this latest book I started last night she is now in college. That’s not really a problem, I mean, since my brother is a junior in high school, my parents have been dragging me all over from Kentucky to Bloomington- basically any school that has won a basketball title in the past 20 years since basketball is what he’s basing his college choice on. Well, that and if they have a journalism school because I guess he wants to be a reporter if he can’t play NBA. So college is okay and all, but this book is just not Nancy Drew. I mean, I’m on page 100 and all she has in the way of a mystery is some pranks at a fraternity house. I mean, Nancy can always find a mystery. You’d think there’d be hundreds on a college campus. And what’s worse, all she and her friends think about are boys and how everyone has a wonderful boyfriend but Nancy. I thought Nancy already had a boyfriend, but he’s gone and now she can’t stop worrying about it for a second to find a mystery to solve. The next book will be “The Mystery of the Missing Boyfriend.” I can’t even follow all her new friends and it’s just all wrong...

The bell rang and I put away my journal and got out of my seat. I suppose I’ll finish the book, I mean, I started it. The big problem is I have two more of them at home my parents bought me last weekend. I never thought I’d meet a Nancy Drew I didn’t like.

“I guess you’ll have to start reading Sweet Valley High,” Stacy suggested, following me out of the room. We would be going our separate ways after this class. I had art and she had choir.

“Not. There are plenty of Nancy Drew’s I have yet to read.”
Stacy shrugged. “Someday you’ll run out.”
“There are hundreds!”
Stacy rolled her eyes.

I thought about Stacy and her Sweet Valley High books. They don’t interest me much. All the girls in those books seemed to care about were their makeup and their boyfriends. “Hey, maybe you’d like to read this book. It’s kind of like Sweet Valley High.”

Stacy eyed the book skeptically. She’d been forced to read Nancy Drew books before, and she doesn’t really care for them. She’s my best friend, but nobody said she is perfect. “I guess I can try it. I just finished mine, but if you’re not done with it yet...”
“Trust me, I can bear to part with it.”

We said goodbye as we reached the choir room and promised to meet after school at our lockers to walk home. Stacy lived up the street from me, and we’d walked together since kindergarten.

“So, Sarah, did you see that Mitch was talking to me in art class today?” asked Kelly.

I had just been in the middle of asking Stacy something about our homework when Kelly Myers and her best friend Amy walked up to us. Kelly was sometimes okay, but sometimes she got on my nerves because she thought every boy liked her. What annoyed me even more is that most of the time she was right.

I turned to Kelly and said, “Yeah, I guess so, he talked a lot about his math class.”

In art class, Kelly and I sat with Mitch, Kelly’s love interest of the week. I had been friends with him for awhile as his sister, Heather, was dating my brother, Chris.

“But then he talked to me about the math teacher we have that he had last year.”

“Gosh, Kelly, when’s the wedding?” Stacy joked.

“Geez, Stacy, I’m not sure, but you’re not invited,” Kelly sounded like she was joking, but I was never sure.

I took a good look at Kelly. She wasn’t very tall and she had such pretty blond, curly hair. It was all pushed back in a headband she used to keep warm. I would have looked like a friz-head in it, but it made her look even cuter than usual. I frowned and pulled my hood over my plain brown hair.

Amy turned to me. “Kelly tells me he talked to you, too.”

I shrugged. “He always talks to me.”

“Well, since he and Kelly are going to be going out and all, maybe you should let her talk more.”

I frowned. Kelly and Mitch going steady? Yeah, I guess maybe but...

“Come on, Amy, we’ll miss our bus,” Kelly pulled on her jacket and gave me a sweet smile. Amy was shorter than Kelly and much heavier. And she thought Kelly was the greatest person in the world.

Kelly turned up her cute little nose and strolled off, with Amy close behind.

Stacy just rolled her eyes.

As we walked home from school, bundled up in our warm winter coats against the frigid Indiana January, I briefly wished that basketball season would be over so my brother could drive us home from school. The high school was just up the street, and when he was in a good mood, or Mom made him, he’d pick us up on his way by. But now he had basketball practice everyday until 5:30, and Stacy and I were forced to tromp
home through the snow and ice. We could have waited for my mom who taught at the high school, but that would be half an hour or more and there was nothing to do after school at the middle school.

“What’s up with Kelly?” Stacy asked.

“Oh, you know how it goes with her and boys.” I was still thinking about what Amy had said about me talking to Mitch too much.

“Yeah, especially after Brian.”

“Brian?” I was confused. “What’s with that?”

“Oh my gosh! You didn’t hear about that—no I guess you wouldn’t have, it happened while you were out sick last week.”

“So tell me!”

“I’m getting to it.” Stacy laughed as we climbed over a snow bank. She was taller than me and had an easier time of it. “Okay, well you knew they broke up, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, he broke up with her.”

“She told me she broke up with him!”

“Where have you been?” Stacy was amazed at my ignorance. “No—he broke up with her because she was flirting with his friends and, well, basically because he can’t stand her because she is so annoying.”

“I imagine that,” I said sarcastically. Kelly annoyed every person I knew. Well, not all the time but eventually she would annoy them.

“Yeah, well that’s the real story, but that’s not the story she’s been telling.”

“Well, she told me in art class that she dumped him because he was boring.”

“Well, he would seem boring to her because he never said anything because she wouldn’t let him get a word in edgewise!” Stacy laughed.

“I laughed too. Kelly could be so crazy.

“Are you going to the game tonight?” I asked Stacy as we reached her house.

“No,” she sighed, “my dad has a banquet tonight, and I’m stuck keeping an eye on the monsters.” Stacy was, of course, referring to her brothers who could be demons when they put their minds to it. They were eight, six, and four, and determined to make Stacy’s life miserable. Compared to them, I was quite happy with my one older brother.

“Your dad should know better than to schedule banquets on Friday nights during basketball season.”

“He’s getting some award for being at his company for fifteen years,” Stacy sighed again, and I knew what a trial her life could be. Sometimes things just weren’t fair when you were the oldest. “I’d have you call me afterwards, but Mikey will already be in bed.” She was referring to the four year old. Stacy wasn’t allowed to make phone call after nine, even if it wasn’t a school night.
"It will give us something to talk about on Saturday at the mall."

"As if we ever run out of things to talk about." We both laughed at the thought of that.

"And if you'd read Nancy Drew, we'd have even more to talk about."

Stacy didn't comment as she started up her steep driveway. Our neighborhood was built on a hill, so getting to our houses was like climbing Mount Everest. "We're still on for the movies tomorrow afternoon, aren't we?"

"Yep, you call me when you wake up."

Stacy agreed and continued on her way.

I trekked past the two houses that separated us. As I let myself in the front door, I thought about my homework. I really ought to get it done even though it was the weekend. I had to have it finished before I could go to weeknight basketball games, but Mom let me slide on the weekend.

I usually didn't pay too much attention to the mail when it came because there was never anything for me. But Mom liked it if I picked it up on my way in. And you never know, I could get a letter. Miracles happen. There was nothing for me today—six letters from colleges for Chris—ohh—a big one from Kentucky. Hmm...

I liked basketball. My brother was the star forward for our high school team, and I'd been sitting in the stands watching him play since I could remember. I hoped he would go to college close by so I could still go to the games. Hanging out at college basketball games was definitely cool. Especially if he went to Indiana University. IU basketball was cool even if you didn't like basketball, and it was only an hour away.

I realized that I was sitting at the kitchen table staring off into space with my history textbook open in front of me. I wondered if I'd still have to have all of my homework done to go to college games. That would be early! I'd be in high school by then. And still trying to write this history essay.

The back door slammed several hours later. I was sitting on the big old plaid couch in the family room watching cartoons. It had to be my brother. He was the only one in the house that slammed the door. That was my first clue, but the real giveaway was when he coughed loudly. He was getting over the flu and could be a real baby about it sometimes.

A few minutes later he joined me on the couch with a pile of cookies and an apple. He was several inches over 6 feet tall and had to bend himself quite a bit to get down onto the couch that sank under his weight. "Still watching Bugs Bunny, dork?"

"He's a lot more intelligent than you are, dork."

"Nerd."

"Stupid head."
He gave up at that point as he put two Oreos in his mouth.

“There’s a letter from Kentucky for you on the table.”

That got him off the couch as he all but ran to the kitchen for it. I stole some cookies as Bugs Bunny blew up Elmer Fudd with dynamite sticks. Where did these woodland creatures get TNT?

“Ooh, a big one,” Chris returned with the letters. He pulled the letter out of the envelope and unfolded it.

“I’m sorry, but you’re too big of a doofus to play basketball for us,” I translated for him.

“Ahh- you’re funny!” Chris replied sarcastically as he scanned the letter. He tossed it down. “Not much I haven’t already heard.”

“They haven’t offered to rename the college Chris Westrom University?” There was not much in life I enjoyed more than cutting on my brother’s ego.

“They said they might if I agree never to bring you on campus. They already have a class idiot.”

“Chris, be nice to your sister.”

I laughed at him.

He hadn’t heard Mom come out of the study where she’d probably been grading papers. She was an English teacher at the high school and since we had to get our homework at least started before dinner, she did her work then, too.

“Look dork brain.”

“MOM!” I shouted as he elbowed me.

“Kids, behave and get in here to help me make dinner,” Mom sighed.

I turned off the TV and Chris whined, “Hey, the cartoon wasn’t over.”

“I thought you didn’t like cartoons.” I fought my way off the couch that was very soft after years of use. They’d had this couch longer than they’d had me. I ran into the kitchen. “Chris got a letter from Kentucky.”

Chris was following me.

Mom asked, “What did Kentucky have to say, honey?”

“Not much.”

“Well, where’s the letter?”

“In the family room.”

“He left it on the couch.” I pulled up a stool at the island in the middle of the kitchen and started pulling off paper towels to put on the table.

“Chris, I’ve asked you not to leave your papers lying around. There might be something important in there.” Mom pulled the hamburger out of the refrigerator and put it on the counter. He trudged back to the family room. “Should we have corn or green beans?”
I turned up my nose at the mention of any green vegetable. "Corn."

Chris returned and handed the envelope to Mom. She dried her hands on the towel that hung on the stove before taking it from him. "Can you put the water on for the macaroni?"

She read over it as I set the table and got out the cups for drinks.

"They want you to visit again over spring break. Did you want to go visit again?"

"I don’t know."

"Well, do you want to go there?"

He shrugged.

"Let us know and we’ll plan a trip, okay?"

"Okay," he muttered.

Mom should have known she wasn’t going to get anything out of him. When it came to talking about where he wanted to go to college, he was at best uninformative.

I started to tell Mom about my Nancy Drew books and the subject of basketball was temporarily dropped.

Later that evening, my parents and I entered the gym as the team was warming up. Mom and Dad took their usual seats among the other players’ parents, and I went to see if I could find any kids I knew from school.

I spotted Kelly Myers. I really wished Stacy were here so I could talk to her and not have to sit with Kelly. Kelly was sitting right below Mitch Hamilton, as usual. He was the cute guy in our art class that Kelly had been talking about earlier. The guy whose sister, Heather, was dating my brother.

As usual, Mitch wasn’t paying too much attention to her. This never seemed to upset Kelly. One more thing I didn’t understand about dating. Why would anyone spend time going after a guy that didn’t like you? I mean, Mitch was an eighth grader. They just didn’t go out with seventh graders like Kelly and me. Besides, Mitch was fairly good looking, I mean if you looked for those kinds of things. He had dark brown hair like his sister and kept it pretty short. I really liked his blue eyes...

What was I talking about! I didn’t gush over boys. I’d leave that to Kelly.

"Hi, Sarah," Kelly said, as I took off my coat and sat down next to her. "Did you hear what Kevin said to Amy?"

"No." I wasn’t much for gossip, especially Kelly’s gossip. She was usually wrong. Last year she told Stacy that some guy liked her and then it turned out that he didn’t even know who Stacy was!

I realized that Kelly was telling me the story that I hadn’t wanted to hear about Kevin. I liked Kevin. I mean, I liked him but I didn’t like him.
Kelly paused to take a breath and finished with, “I mean can you believe that?” She flipped her blond hair for emphasis.

She said it loud enough that unless he was completely deaf, Mitch couldn’t have missed it.

He looked down at us, as he’d been watching the teams on the court. “Hey Sarah. How’s your brother feeling?”

“Pretty good.” The whole town seemed to know if one of the basketball players had even a little sniffle.

“Good, we need to win tonight.” Mitch looked back to the court.

I’d missed school a week ago because of the flu and I guess I gave it to Chris since he’d gotten sick on Monday, totally throwing off his game Tuesday night. He’d played anyway, much against the wishes of our mother, but what could you do?

I hadn’t told anyone it was my fault he’d been sick. We were studying the Civil War in history class and I feared a lynching.

“Well, if you hadn’t given him the flu,” Kelly opened her big mouth.

Mitch returned his attention to us. “It’s been going around. I just hope no one else on the team caught it.”

Mitch didn’t seem to be overly upset with me. I sighed in relief.

He continued: “Heather stayed home tonight. She isn’t feeling well.”

Heather, my brother’s girlfriend, must have felt really bad to miss a game. She went to all of the games even before she and my brother started dating. He’d called her earlier when he’d gotten that letter from Kentucky. No wonder he’d been in a bad mood after that. She was his own personal cheering section.

Mitch and I talked a little while longer. He liked to watch college basketball as I did and we talked a little bit about how Indiana was doing this season and whether or not they might fire the coach, Bobby Knight.

He went back to talking to his eighth grade friends and I looked at Kelly to mention something about our art projects, but she was strangely silent and wouldn’t even look at me.

“Is Amy coming to the game?” Amy was Kelly’s best friend and they usually weren’t apart. Of course the same could be said for me and Stacy, and here I was alone.

She shook her head but didn’t really answer.

So I did what I had actually come here to do in the first place: watch the basketball game.

We easily defeated the Maytown Chargers. They weren’t that great a team and Chris played pretty well considering he’d been unable to get out of bed three days ago.
I escaped Kelly and her silent treatment as soon as the buzzer sounded and went to find my parents. They were at the bench—okay, it’s really just a row of chairs—talking to Chris.

“...So I’ll be home in about an hour. I’m just going to drop by Heather’s for a few minutes and see how she’s feeling.”

“Are you coming home right after that?” Mom was asking, probably worried that he was still sick. His acting routine must have worked.

“I won’t be going out with the guys. I’m tired.” He picked up his warm-ups and noticed me. “Hey, shorty.”

I gave him my best look of contempt. Just because he was a foot taller than me didn’t mean he could make short jokes. “Nice game, dork.”

Dad put his arm around me and ruffled my hair. “We’ll see you later, champ.”

The next afternoon, my mom dropped Stacy and me off at the mall so we could go to the movies. Leonardo DiCaprio had a new movie out and Stacy had to see it. I was telling her how Kelly wouldn’t talk to me during the game.

“Was she gazing at Mitch?”

“That must have been it,” I agreed. We had some time left before the movie was to start so we were wandering the halls of the pitiful Midbury Mall. I mean, we didn’t even have a decent bookstore. Some of the malls in the bigger towns had two or three of them. The one we had didn’t have much of a selection. But they had Nancy Drew books so I wasn’t going to complain too loudly.

“Can we stop here?” Stacy slowed down as we approached Fashion Outlet, one of the cooler clothing stores in town. Neither of us could really afford anything there but we always stopped in anyway just in case there were maybe some sale things we could talk our parents into.

“Ugh, who would wear this?” Stacy picked up an orange mini-skirt that had blue diagonal stripes on it.

“Not me,” I wandered around a bit.

“Can I help you?”

I looked up to see Heather, my brother’s girlfriend, who was wearing a name tag.

“Hey, I didn’t know you worked here.”

“I just started this week,” Heather said.

“I thought you had the flu.”

“I think I do,” Heather sniffed. “But my mom didn’t think I could call in sick on only my second day of work. Anyway, I’m only here for four hours.”

“Mitch said you weren’t at the game last night,” I said.
“No,” she sighed. “My mom made me go to bed.” I thought she still looked really pretty despite the fact that she had the flu. If I had her gorgeous long dark hair and a perfect body I sure wouldn’t be dating a dork like my brother!

“Sounds like a drag,” Stacy said, joining the conversation after inspecting a display of sweaters.

“It was. How was the game?”

“Not bad.” I frowned, “Didn’t Chris tell you last night when he stopped by?”

“Uh, no that didn’t come up... well, I best get back to work. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Bye,” I said.

“Do you suppose she can get us her discount?” Stacy asked as we left the store.

“She might,” I shrugged. “But Chris definitely better on my birthday present!”

“Oh, no fair!” Stacy pouted and looked at her watch. “Hey, we better get going.”

“Hey, can we stop at the bookstore?”

“No, we’re already late for the movie!”

Stacy was pulling me through the mall, not even letting me stop to look at the puppies in the pet store.

Monday at school began uneventfully. There wasn’t much of a weekend to talk about so Stacy told me the tale of how David, the middle brother, had tried to make playdough out of butter while her mother was making Sunday dinner.

The adventure didn’t begin until last period.

I walked into the art studio. I had to squint for a second as there are windows all around the room and the bright afternoon sunshine was glaring off the snow. The white tile floor didn’t do much to dampen the effect and the polished wood tables seemed to be glowing.

There were seventh and eighth graders in this class. This was the leftover class since there weren’t enough of either grade to have separate sections so we just all got put in here together.

We’re working on mosaics, pictures made up of lots of little pieces of colored paper. They take nearly forever to do but look pretty cool if you get them right.

I collected my supplies and took my seat at the table across from Kelly who was beside Mitch. One of Mitch’s friends, Alex, sat next to me. He was pretty tall and played for the eighth grade basketball team. I think he’d been at Friday’s game, but as all the eighth graders sat behind me, I didn’t really pay attention.

Kelly wouldn’t look at me, but I smiled as I sat down.

“Good game Friday night, huh, Sarah.” Mitch said.

“Yeah, not bad,” I said. “Tuesday should be better, we play Westside.”

“Definitely.”

I looked down at my art project. My mosaic was supposed to be a horse, but it looked like a dog with really long legs.

"Hey, did you talk to Chris last night?" Mitch asked as he cut up little squares of red paper for the Indianapolis 500 racecar he was making.

"No, why?"

"I was just wondering if you knew why my sister and your brother were fighting."

"They are?" This was news to me. Chris had gone over the night before and he was home early, but I had just assumed it was because she was still sick.

"Yeah, they were yelling at each other and then she told him to leave."

"I guess he seemed a little ticked off this morning when he left for school, but I never know. Why, what did you hear?"

"Nothing really, I was just hoping you knew something."

We usually kept each other updated on the things that went on between our siblings. It was always nice to know things just in case you needed a ride to the mall.

"I'll let you know if I hear anything."

I looked over at Kelly who was making a butterfly. She wouldn’t look at me.

What was her problem? She’d ignored me at lunch, too, but I’d been too busy talking to Stacy and hadn’t thought much of it.

"Kelly?" I asked.

"Yes?"

"What are you going to do for the newspaper editorial that Mrs. Anders assigned?"

"Backstabbing friends," I thought I heard her say.

"What?"

"Nothing."

After school I told Stacy what I thought I overheard Kelly saying.

"Well, maybe she just thinks you’re trying to take Mitch from her," Stacy pulled out her history text book.

"Taking him? He’s not hers. He’s just a guy who happens to be a friend of mine."

"Well, you know how Kelly is."

"She’s just mad because he doesn’t like her."

Stacy shrugged. "True, but Kelly isn’t used to that."

I knew there was something wrong with Chris when he didn’t attack the fridge when he got home from basketball practice. He went straight to his room to start on his homework without even insulting me. Maybe Mitch was right.
“Do you know what’s wrong with Chris?” Mom asked me when he left the dining room table without eating his dessert.

Should I tell? Of course I should! That’s what younger sisters were for. “He had a fight with Heather.”

“Oh, both of my parents said. Last year he’d broken up with Molly, a girl he’d been seeing for nearly a year and he’d been in a bad mood for a month. He acted like his whole world was over or something.

I couldn’t fathom liking a guy so much that if he left it would depress me so that I didn’t even eat! Especially since we were having cherry pie.

And if that was the way things were supposed to go, I wasn’t dating until college. Well after reading Nancy Drew maybe I wouldn’t ever date.

“You know,” Dad said, ”he mentioned something to me about Heather not wanting him to go to the University of Kentucky and he won’t tell me whether or not he wants to visit again.”

“I think he said that Heather is planning on going to IU,” Mom replied. “I hope he doesn’t base his decision on her.”

“Mitch said they were yelling at each other last night.”

“Who is Mitch?”

“Heather’s younger brother. He’s in my art class.”

Mom and Dad looked at each other in that way that told me that they didn’t want to talk in front of me.

“I think I’ll go read my history homework.” I put my dishes in the sink and made for the stairs.

At about seven, the phone rang. I was lying on my bed reading my history text book. I grabbed the phone on the second ring. “Hello?”

“Hey, Sar, what’s up?”

“Hey Stac’, not much, what’s up with you?”

“Well, I just got off the phone with Amy...”

“Yeah?”

“Well, she said that Kelly Myers told her that you asked Mitch to go to a movie with you and that he was probably coming over to your house tonight and your parents probably weren’t going to be home.”

“Oh my gosh, she did NOT!”

“Yes she did!”

“No way!”

“Way!”
“Stacy, you know better than that! My parents never go out on a school night and I think I would have told you if I’d asked Mitch out!”

“Well, I know that, but Kelly is telling people other things!” I groaned. “If she starts that, then everyone is going to hate me and think I have guys over all the time with my parents out, that I steal my friend’s guys, and that’s not true! What am I going to do!”

“She’s jealous,” Stacy decided.

“What?” I couldn’t imagine Kelly being jealous of anyone. “She has a new boyfriend every week.”

“But you know she wants Mitch Hamilton. She’s had a crush on him since 6th grade!”

“No way!”

“Way! And Amy told me she’s making a deal out of this so Mitch will notice her since she’s sure that she could get him from you if he thinks that you’re spreading rumors.”

“She’s the one starting it!”

“I think she’s counting on him not questioning it.”

“Besides, what does she mean, ‘get him from me’, I never had him.”

“But do you want to go out with him?”

“I don’t want to date him. I’m not interested in dating anyone. I just can’t believe Kelly would say these things about me. I thought she was my friend!”

“Well, he is cute, in sort of a Leonardo DiCaprio way.”

“Stacy, you’d date any guy that could even spell Leonardo DiCaprio.”

Stacy laughed but didn’t say anything. My brother has a fight with his girlfriend and suddenly I’m in the middle of a soap opera. It was worse than what they’d done to Nancy Drew. And it was happening to my life! At least Nancy seemed to be having a good time at what she was doing.

I sighed. “Look, nothing happened. If everyone would drop it, it would just go away.”

“You tell that to Kelly.”

“Kelly needs to get a grip, big time.”

Stacy finally changed the subject. “I really like that book you gave me. They should have called it Nancy Drew Gets a Life.”

“Ha ha,” I said. Maybe this topic wasn’t much better.

“So does she get with this new guy at the end or does she spend her whole life crying over her old boyfriend?”
“I don’t know, I picked up the 5th book of the series so I missed a lot,” I warmed up a bit to this conversation. Stacy usually never talked about, much less read Nancy Drew. Maybe one of these days I could get her to read one of the real mysteries.

“I bet she ditched him. The new one, Jake, seems way cooler.”

Then I had a reality check. I couldn’t believe I was discussing Nancy Drew’s love life! Nancy was supposed to be one of the normal ones that didn’t waste her time on these things! “Well, I have two more of the series.” I managed to remain remarkably calm. “If you want them you can have them.”

“I might, but now I’ve got to get to my homework.”

“Right, see you tomorrow.”

“Bye.”

Much to my dismay, that night I discovered that the only Nancy Drew books I had that I hadn’t read were the college ones.

“Party Weekend, oh joy,” I muttered to myself as I climbed into bed.

But my mind did not stay on the book for very long. I kept drifting back to what Stacy had told me. I mean, why did people say things like that even though they know they aren’t true?

But Kelly had done these things before. I just made me really nervous to think that it was me this time.

I hadn’t known she liked Mitch. I thought being her sort-of friend and all I would be safe but I guess not.

I finally put away my book and tried to go to sleep. I didn’t have much luck.

The next morning Stacy and I met to walk to school as usual. It was only five blocks from our neighborhood. It would be closer except our moms wouldn’t let us walk through the woods behind my house.

“Nancy and Jake do get together.”

“Do they? They didn’t at the end of this book.” Stacy pulled the book I’d loaned her out of her neon pink backpack. She handed it to me and tossed her backpack on her left shoulder.

“I started another one that’s later in the series and they’re all mushy in love,” I shuddered in disgust.

Stacy chuckled. “I thought you weren’t going to read any more of those.”

“It was the only thing in my room I hadn’t read before besides my history text book. Ten pages on the Civil War was all I could handle.”

“You did better than me. I’m going to flunk that quiz today.”
Stacy rattled on about history class as my mind drifted off. I didn't want to go to school today. I was thankful that Stacy hadn't mentioned the whole Kelly thing. I was dreading it too much already. A pit was forming in my stomach and I was beginning to wish I hadn't eaten that extra waffle.

What if I ran into Kelly this morning? Would she be looking for me?

At lunch Kelly didn't talk to me, but I could tell she was looking at me and I caught Karen and Amy giving me glares a couple of times. But I made it through without a confrontation.

By the end of English class, however, I feared art class.

I hated Kelly. How could she do this to me? I thought she was my friend!

I briefly considered skipping class, but I knew that wasn't really an option. I drug my feet as I walked down the hallway toward the art room. It gave me plenty of time to think about the Mitch situation, as well as the horse/dog mosaic thing that was making art class even less of a desirable event. It had gotten worse since yesterday.

I paused to glance into the band room and considered taking up the saxophone. If you were in band you only took one semester of art and since I'd taken it in the fall...

I wandered into the art room as the bell rang. I had already decided to sit next to Kelly as usual To move would be to make more of an already troublesome situation. Besides, there was nowhere else to sit.

I dropped my books on the table without even looking at Kelly who was already (still) talking to Mitch. She tried to ignore me, but Mitch noticed.

"Your brother didn't come over last night."

I glanced at Kelly. She smiled sweetly. Well, I guess she wasn't saying anything here in front of him since he would know she was lying.

"Yeah, he was pretty moody, too."

"Heather stayed home from school again even though she isn't very sick any more."

"My parents are worried that he'll make a decision about where he'll go to college because of her."

"Don't they like my sister?" Mitch seemed a little offended.

"They like her and all..." I couldn't really think of anything good to say that wouldn't make the matter worse.

But he continued, "My parents won't pay for her to go to Kentucky."

"I don't know what he's going to do."

Kelly spoke at this point. "I think if he really loved her, he'd go to IU."

"What does that have to do with it?" I asked her.

"You don't have to be rude," Kelly said. "I just think if he loved her, he'd want to be with her, but obviously he'd rather get away from her."
Mitch was getting a little bit uncomfortable as he tried to start talking about basketball with Alex, but Kelly wouldn’t let him go that easily.

“Wouldn’t you go to college where your girlfriend was going, I mean if you really loved her?” She was tipping her head so that her blond hair shone in the light from the window. She almost looked like an angel.

More like a devil.

He shrugged. “I don’t have to decide that for a few years. Besides, I don’t think IU and Kentucky will be offering basketball scholarships.”

“I’d go where my boyfriend went,” Kelly said, smiling at Mitch.

“If you had one,” I muttered.

“I could get one before you could, Sarah.”

“At least I don’t tell lies about my friends.”

“And I do?” Kelly smiled at me innocently, as if daring me to say what she’d been telling everyone about me and Mitch.

Alex who’d been silent up to this point rolled his eyes. “The things that girls worry about.”

Yeah, if Mitch only knew what Kelly was saying about him!

“Stacy! Kelly is acting like she isn’t saying all those things about me and I know she knows!”

“Well, I don’t think you want to know what Karen asked me in choir today,” Stacy was serious as she closed her locker.

“What did she say?”

“I guess she’s been talking to Amy and Kelly because she wanted to know how I could still be your friend when you’d been trying to take away Kelly’s man.”

“I didn’t try anything!”

“I told her that, but I don’t think she believed me.”

“Why does everyone believe Kelly and not us?”

“Sarah, you’ve been around this school long enough to know that it’s not what you did, it’s what Kelly said you did.”

“Why should she get to...”

I was in mid-sentence when my life nearly ended.

Kelly and her friends, Amy and Karen, were following Mitch down the hall out to the busses and as he passed by, Mitch said, “See you at the game, Sarah.”

I started to smile and then I caught Kelly’s look of death and froze. Amy and Karen looked at me like they couldn’t believe what I was doing.

I wasn’t doing anything! But I still knew I was in trouble.
“Uh, oh,” Stacy said, as the girls walked away, whispering frantically, and glancing back over their shoulders at me.

“I think I’ll stay home tonight and hide,” I decided.

“No way, if you do that, then you’ll look really guilty. You have to be there to defend yourself.”

“Karen didn’t believe you last period,” I reminded her.

“But you said Kelly didn’t talk in front of Mitch. Maybe nothing will be said.”

“Yes, it will. Stacy my life is over and I didn’t do anything.”

“We just have to convince everyone of that.”

“Without Mitch knowing! Oh my God, I’d die if he found out.”

“Why? I bet he’d believe you.”

“I doubt it,” I replied. “You know how boys always believe Kelly just because Kelly is perfect and...”

“Kelly is not perfect.”

“It does us a lot of good that the two of us know that.”

“Well, Kelly won’t tell him so maybe we’re safe for awhile.”

Mom and I were in the kitchen finishing up dinner when Chris arrived home. We were having spaghetti, and I was cleaning carrots for the salads.

“Hey-you got another letter from Kentucky.” I said, pointing to the counter where the letter was sitting.

“Great.” Chris ignored the letter and walked straight through the kitchen and up the back stairs.

“That’s strange—I thought he wanted to hear from Kentucky.” Mom dried her hands on the towel that hung from the stove.

“Heather doesn’t want him to go to Kentucky,” I reminded her.

“Yes,” Mom seemed to know something, now. “Keep an eye on the spaghetti sauce. I’ll be down in a minute.”

Mom disappeared up the stairs and in the next five minutes I had to rescue the sauce, drain the spaghetti, and toss the salad so I didn’t have a spare moment to wonder what she had gone to talk to him about.

Dad arrived home from his office just in time to save the garlic bread from burning in the oven. “Hey, kiddo, Mom leave you in charge tonight?”

“She’s up talking to Chris.”

“Oh,” Dad seemed to get the same thing Mom got and was gone.

About 10 minutes later I was sitting alone at the kitchen table watching the spaghetti get cold. On the counter next to the mail was the College Nancy Drew I had yet to read. The first one hadn’t been so bad.
This one was called *Keeping Secrets*. I wondered if Nancy and her new boyfriend, Jake, had resolved the problems they'd been having in the one I'd read. There had been several between this one and that one. Maybe I ought to get them. I could maybe see if they would take me to the book store this weekend...

What was I thinking! If I was going to spend my allowance on another Nancy Drew book it was going to be a real mystery!

But since this one was here, I might as well read it. I started to eat my dinner as I read.

"Sarah? Sarah?"
I looked up at Mom. They had all returned to the kitchen and I hadn't even heard them come in. This was a good one. "Yes?"
"Thanks for finishing dinner. I'm sorry you had to wait."
I'd forgotten about eating. Man, I get into a good book and the rest of the world just kind of goes away.

Chris had come down as well, and was still talking to Dad about tonight's game. I wondered what had gone on up there.
"It got cold," I complained, playing in the stiff spaghetti.
"It's still edible," Chris shoved a big forkful into his mouth.
Mom smiled. She was probably thinking it was a good excuse to go out to eat.

That thought had crossed my mind, but I was hungry now.
"We have to pick up Stacy for the game," I reminded her.
"Right," Mom agreed and looked at her watch. "We've got to get going, you'd better hurry, Chris."
"Yeah," Chris grabbed some garlic bread and his bag. "Bye."
"Have a good game, honey," Mom said as he opened the back door.
"What was all that about upstairs?" I asked once we heard his car start in the garage.
"College and stuff," Mom said.
"Is he still mad at Heather?"
"No, he's not mad. He's just not sure what to do and she keeps telling him and, well,..." Mom wasn't making much sense to me. "We just told him to do what he wants, but to consider all the options before making a decision."
"I like Heather," I said, thinking about the conversation I'd had with Mitch in art class.
"We do too, honey."

* * * * * *
When we arrived at the game there weren't many people around yet since we were a little early as Mom needed to talk to some people. Stacy and I took our usual seats and waited to see what would happen.

Mitch and Heather arrived a few minutes after we did. I was kind of surprised to see Heather since she'd stayed home from school.

Then I decided that Mitch must hate me as he sat down right behind Stacy and me. I made a real effort to not even look at him as Stacy and I were furiously pretending to be interest in a conversation about school and anything else that didn't involve basketball, Kelly, or Mitch.

Alex joined Mitch, along with some other guys and his girlfriend Katelin, and he gave me a strange look as he walked past.

I tried to ignore him, too. Kelly was not going to have anything to accuse me of this evening.

But Kelly had other plans, I'm sure, as she arrived with Amy and Karen. They took a seat near the bottom of the stands and kept looking at Stacy and me.

I was miserable. I wanted to go home and hide. But as my parents were my ride, there was no way I was getting out of here unless I was dying or something.

What had I done to deserve this? I hadn't done anything different this past week than all year. I talked to Mitch who was my friend and suddenly Kelly hated me and was trying to make everyone else hate me, too.

"You need to chill out, Sarah," Stacy tried to calm me. Didn't she understand that my social life was over because Kelly hated me? Maybe she should just save herself and stop being my friend, too.

I made the mistake of looking over my shoulder to see the scoreboard during a time out and Mitch caught my eye.

"You're awfully quiet tonight for such a big game, Sarah," he said. "This is the best one I've seen all season."

"Yeah," I replied without turning to look at him. Maybe Kelly wouldn't know he was talking to me, maybe...

Maybe that wasn't Kelly looking at me like she was going to kill me...

I wasn't enjoying the game. My brother had scored...I wasn't sure how many points. I usually knew exactly how many baskets he had. I usually cared. Now I just wanted Kelly Myers to disappear.

At half time I went down to Mom and Dad to get money for a snack. In spite of it all I was a little hungry. Okay maybe it had something to do with the fact that I hadn't eaten much dinner because the spaghetti was cold. Stacy followed me over to where my parents were sitting, but she paused to talk to some of her Westside friends who went to
her church. Westside wasn’t very far from Midbury. I didn’t feel like being social, so I went on without her.

I went around the back way to get to the snack bar. There were hallways on either side of the bleachers, and I took the long way in an attempt to miss Kelly in case she’d been wandering around. I hadn’t looked to see if she was still in her seat because I was trying to avoid all eye contact with her. But suddenly, Kelly was right there in my path with Amy and Karen who’d been with her earlier. I should have waited for Stacy...

“Where are you going, Sarah?” Kelly asked.

I would have walked past them but they were blocking my path in the hallway.

“Snack bar,” I said as noncommittally as I could, searching for an escape.

“How can you steal a guy from Kelly and not even have the guts to admit it!” Amy apparently hadn’t heard me.

“If you know, why do I have to tell you?” Even that wasn’t enough to make her hit me.

She just glared at me.

“Admit it!” She shouted.

“Admit it.” Kelly crossed her arms. At least she wasn’t going to hit me.

“Hey girls, arguing over clothes?” Alex, Mitch’s best friend, was walking past with his girlfriend, Katelin.
Kelly was distracted long enough for me to push past between Kelly and Amy and run down the hall towards the main lobby.

“This isn’t over, Sarah!” Kelly shouted, but I wouldn’t have turned around for anything in the world.

When I reached the lobby, I got in line at the snack bar, not really wanting anything to eat, but not wanting to go back and face my parents or Stacy after what had just happened. Right at this moment, I hated life.

“Hey Sarah, what was that all about?” Alex and Katelin had gotten in line right behind me. I hadn’t even noticed that I’d reached lobby before them.

“Kelly hates me.”

“I thought she was your best friend or something. The two of you are always gossiping in class,” he shrugged. He must be thinking that I was being concerned about useless things again.

I don’t know what made me say what I said just then, if it was his attitude or what Kelly had just done to me, but I found myself saying: “Look, Kelly hates me because she thinks that Mitch likes me and not her. She’s gone so far as to tell everyone, or at least most of the 7th grade that he and I have been doing stuff that we haven’t and now she’s made all of her friends hate me.”

“She said that you and Mitch did what?”

“That we’re going together.”

“You’re not.”

“I know that.”

“Then why is Kelly...” Alex sounded confused.

“Because she likes him. I don’t know. Just forget it.”

I didn’t wait for a reaction as I was at the front of the line and turned to order my popcorn. I walked away without looking back, but they never tried to get my attention. Wonderful, now Mitch was sure to know.

“Did you have to pop it yourself?” Stacy asked, getting up. She was still talking with her church friends but was ready to go back to our seats.

I was not going back over there. So I sat down a row below where she had been sitting.

“Don’t you want to go back to the Midbury section?”

“No, this is fine.”

Stacy frowned, and stepped down to sit next to me. “Okay...”

“I ran into Kelly in the hall.” I ate some popcorn and didn’t look at her because I was afraid I was going to start crying. The second half of the game was starting, and I was staring off into the bleachers at the other side of the gym.
“Oh my gosh, Sarah, what happened?”
“She accused me off all that stuff and then all her friends, that I thought were my friends, Amy and Karen and everyone...” A tear ran down my cheek.
“Oh Sar!” Stacy put her arm around me, spilling some popcorn. “How could they! I should have gone with you. We’ve got to do something to her!”
“What can we do?”
“Tell Mitch!”
“Well, I think he already knows.” I briefly explained about the snack bar incident.
“Oh my gosh, Alex must have told Mitch, maybe he didn’t if he didn’t think it was important, but,...” Stacy looked back toward where the guys were looking. “Oops, he’s looking right at us.”
“My life is over. I wanna go home.”
“We can’t go home Your parents will never take us before the game is over.”
“What if he comes over here. I mean, I would die of the embarrassment of it.”
“Sarah...” Stacy couldn’t find anything to say that would console me.
I just sat there, miserable, and ate my popcorn, not saying anything well into the fourth quarter of the game. I was feeling really sick to my stomach, and probably should have stopped eating that popcorn....
“Stacy, I don’t feel so good.”
“It will be okay,” Stacy didn’t get what I meant as she was paying attention to the game.
“No, I don’t think so.” I got up and ran out of the stands, and just barely made it to the bathroom before I threw up.
Popcorn had not been a good idea.
Stacy had followed me, but did not arrive until a few moments later.
“Sarah, oh my gosh, are you all right?” Stacy was knocking on the door to the bathroom.
“Uhgh ...” I moaned.
“Sarah, this has got to stop Now you’re getting sick.”
I didn’t reply. I felt awful. And suddenly it occurred to me that I could stay home from school tomorrow if my mom saw me like this. I was honestly sick, but I think facing school tomorrow would be worse than...anything.
I finally managed to say, “Can you get my mom?”
“Right, I’ll be back,” I heard her feet pound out of the bathroom.
I leaned against the wall of the bathroom stall as the tears started to fall down my cheek. What had I done to deserve this?
“Sarah? Honey?” My mom arrived. “Oh, sweetie, are you okay?”
“I’ll be okay,” I flushed the toilet and left the stall.
“Stacy, can you get a cup from the concession stand so she can rinse out her mouth.” Mom put her arm around me and led me over to the sink. “You’re not getting sick again, are you? you just got over the flu.”
“I don’t know, I just feel bad.”
“You didn’t eat much dinner, but when you asked to get a snack I thought you were better. You haven’t looked good all day,” Mom continued to stroke my hair and I was much relieved because I was sure she’d let me stay home from school tomorrow.
“I just don’t feel well.”
“I’ll go get the keys from your dad and drive you and Stacy home. He can probably get a ride with the Prices.”
“Okay”
Stacy returned as Mom left and handed me the cup. “We’ve got to think of something, Sarah. Kelly can’t do this to you.”
“Well, maybe Mitch will take care of it.”
“Are you staying home tomorrow?”
“Stacy, I can’t face that. Kelly hates me so much. I can’t...”
Mom returned. She brought Dad with her. He said that the game was almost over already, and he looked really worried.
“Are you feeling okay, kiddo?”
“Been better.” He had my coat and draped it around my shoulder. Maybe Daddy could make it all better.

Mom didn’t wake me for school the next day. She left me a note that said to call her at school if I needed anything and Stacy was picking up my homework.
I felt fine, in terms of my stomach, but I was still mad at Kelly.
I made myself a bowl of Cheerios and watched cartoons until lunch. I had a sandwich and worked on the final draft of the newspaper editorial I had due Thursday. I guess there was no reason to flunk out of school just because I was now a social reject. Maybe my parents would let me transfer to Westside. Maybe Stacy could come with me. She has friends there. Life would be good.
But my parents wouldn’t do that and I was going to have to go back- eventually.

Mom arrived home at 3:30 and I was back on the couch watching Bugs Bunny. The Cartoon Network was a wonderful thing.
“Feeling better?”
“Yeah,” I admitted.
“Must just have been something you ate.” Mom felt my forehead even though I’d never had a fever to begin with. “I have your homework. Want to come into the study while I grade grammar quizzes?”

“Sure. I’ve already got my English done,” I pulled myself off that couch

“You really must have been sick!”

“Ha ha.” I paused in the kitchen to get a glass of juice.

I was still in my pajamas and shuffled down the hall in my slippers. Mom had put my books on the table across from where she sat. “You’ve seemed a little down the past few days. Anything you want to talk about?”

I shrugged my shoulders and opened my folder that had my assignment sheet in it.

Hmm, math problems...

“I haven’t seen you talk to Kelly Myers in awhile.”

“She and I aren’t getting along,” I didn’t look up as I put my name on the top of my math worksheet. I really didn’t want to talk about this with her. There was no way she’d understand. So I changed the subject. “Has Chris talked to Heather yet?”

“I don’t think so. Was she at the game last night?”

“I think I saw her.”

“He misses her, I think. Monday night when he didn’t go over to work on his journalism as he usually does, he seemed lost.”

“Yeah, I like her. Better than Molly anyway,” I turned up my nose at the thought of his last girlfriend.

“Oh, come on. Molly was nice.”

“Molly called me “baby.” I hated that.”

Mom smiled. “Maybe something will work out.”

Stacy called that night right after dinner. “Oh my gosh, Sarah! Mitch asked me where you were and I guess he totally ditched Kelly when she tried to talk to him before school.”

“Does everyone still hate me?”

“I don’t know. I sat with everyone at lunch and Kelly wasn’t speaking to me, but Amy and I talked about science and Karen was the one who told me that Mitch ditched her. I think maybe they’re starting to doubt Kelly’s story.”

“Did you tell anyone the truth?”

“Not really, but when Karen and I were talking I said that you had never said anything to me about even liking Mitch and you’d think I would know if anything was up.”

“Of course I would tell you, especially if I was going out with a guy like Kelly was saying I was doing.”
“Like you would tell Kelly anything you wouldn’t tell me.”
“I don’t think so!” I was feeling a lot better. Maybe I could face school again. I’d have to. Mom would never let me stay home again after eating three brownies at dinner.

“Hey, my mom took me to the mall after school and I got the first one of those Nancy Drew books.”
“Was your mom shocked to see you buying Nancy Drew?”
“I think she was just glad that I wasn’t buying any more Sweet Valley- but you’ll never guess what happened to Ned...”
“No no, don’t tell me!” I protested. “I want to read it!”
“I just started it, but maybe next week.”
“Ugh, read faster!”
“I have my editorial to finish.”
“I did it this afternoon.”
“Well, some of us had school.”
“Yeah, well...” I laughed.

We talked for a while longer and I was beginning to think that just maybe my life wasn’t over.

I was still apprehensive as Stacy and I walked to school the next day. She reminded me that she’d had to walk all alone yesterday in the freezing cold, and did I realize that it was the second time in two weeks I’d done this too her?

I let her complain. Then I didn’t have to think about the possibility of Kelly attacking me at lunch.

But things went really cool. Karen actually smiled to me in the hall, but Amy still turned her nose up at me. I didn’t see Kelly until lunch so that must mean she wasn’t looking for me because in a school as small as ours, you could be found if you were wanted.

I sat at the end of our usual table, across from Stacy and no one seemed to think that I didn’t belong there, and Kelly didn’t say too much. I wondered what the heck had happened to make her change her attitude.

However in art class, things were to get out of hand.

I got my project and sat down at the table. It was due the next day and I was going to have to rush to get it done. I tried not to look at anyone as Mitch, Kelly and Alex had already sat down, as usual.

“Where were you yesterday, Sarah?” Kelly asked me.
I looked up at her a bit warily. “I was sick.”
“Really?” She sounded like she didn’t believe me.
“Yeah...?” I was suspicious as to her motives.

“Oh, it’s just that you seem to be sick a lot lately.”

“Two days, I had the flu, and then...well, I was sick.”

“Just asking, you don’t have to get all defensive on me.”

I wondered if Mitch had ever said anything to Kelly about what Alex told him. I wondered what Alex had told him. I wondered if Mitch really knew anything at all. Maybe I was paranoid. We were all staring at our art projects like we didn’t really want to have anything to do with each other.

“Amy told me that you’ve been telling everyone that I’ve been telling lies about you,” Kelly said after a few minutes silence.

I stared at her for a minute. Was she serious? What kind of jerk was this girl?

“The only person I said anything to was Stacy,” I replied.

“And me,” Alex said.

“But you saw her corner me at the basketball game. I didn’t tell you anything but the truth.”

Kelly looked down. “You know it really hurts when your friends tell lies about you.” If I didn’t know better I’d think Kelly’s feelings were actually hurt.

“I know exactly how it feels!” I exploded. “Kelly, I am getting really tired of you!”

“Me? I’m not the one spreading rumors that I have a boyfriend and I don’t.”

“Kelly Myers you ask anyone in this school and they will tell you that you started every single rumor because you’re mad because a guy you like doesn’t like you!”

“Sarah, Kelly, can you keep it down please?” said Mrs. Kelsner, our art teacher. We got quiet for a minute.

“I never told anyone anything and you know it,” I whispered furiously.

“Why would I have told anyone about the things you do?”

“Because you think that just because Mitch and I are friends it threatens your plot to get him to ask you out!”

“How did I get involved in this mess?” Mitch asked.

“You’ve been in it from the start,” Alex said.

“I don’t understand what happened here.” I guess Mitch had had enough of this and was going to say something. His blue eyes clearly showed his anger. “All I know is that you two have been fighting and then two nights ago at the game Alex comes back and tells me that Kelly had Sarah cornered in the hall with a whole bunch of her friends and that Kelly has been telling everyone that Sarah and me have been going out and I don’t even know what’s going on!”

“Join the club,” I sighed.
“Look,” Kelly was calm as she spoke to Mitch. “All I did was tell like two people what Sarah had been saying about you and her, and well, I never believed it. I was just shocked that Sarah would say such things.”

“Then why did you corner me at the basketball game? Why were you telling everyone the stories like you believed them? Why didn’t you want Mitch to know?”

“I thought it would hurt him to hear about you, a friend of his, telling lies about him.”

“Sarah doesn’t tell lies about people, Kelly, you do.” I could tell that Mitch was angry.

“Mitch, how can you say that about me?”

“Because everyone knows you lie, Kelly.” I was amazed that the guys were standing up for me.

“Mitch I was just trying to protect you from her!”

“What he needs is protection from you,” I shot back at her. It felt good to be finally getting this off my chest. Keeping it all inside had been killing me.

Mrs. Kelsner arrived just then and said, “I already asked you once to be quiet. Sarah, please go sit over by Mindy, Kelly, by my desk.”

Busted.

I was so happy that someone finally believed me. I was amazed and very happy. Maybe Kelly wasn’t going to win this time. Maybe my life wasn’t over. Maybe I wouldn’t have to transfer to Westside.

I happily worked on my project the rest of the period. I didn’t know the people I was sitting next to very well so I didn’t talk. My project was going to get done on time. Everything seemed to be going my way.

After class Kelly bolted and Mitch was waiting for me at the door. “So what exactly did Kelly say?”

“Oh,” I started, “She just said that I’d asked you to go to the movies last weekend and you were coming over to my house and everything. I don’t know how she thought she was going to get away with it. I mean, you and I both know nothing ever happened.” I sounded a lot more confident than I really felt. I was hoping that maybe he would be convinced.

He laughed. “She’s insane. I think I would have heard first, you know?”

“I might have mentioned it to you.”

“Exactly. Maybe we can get Mrs. Kelsner to move her permanently.”

“That would be nice.”

“See you later.”

“Bye.” I stopped at my locker where Stacy was waiting.
"You seem happy, what happened?"
I quickly reviewed the events for her.
"See, I told you it would work out."
I smiled. "I wasn’t so sure. But there’s one thing I know, I am not going to be 
friends with Kelly Myers any more."
"Seriously. She is such a jerk."
"Tell me about it."

I was lying on my bed, reading a magazine about basketball that I’d stolen from 
my brother’s room when the phone rang. For a moment I dreaded it being Stacy with 
some new development about Kelly.
"Hello?" I answered it. The phone was right next to my bed and I could reach it 
without much effort.
"Hi, is Chris there?"
"Sure thing." I thought I recognized the voice so I said, "Heather?"
"Yeah, is this Sarah?"
"Yes."
"Is Chris still mad at me?"
"My mom thinks that he misses you."
"Really? I’ve been kind of a jerk. Do you think he’ll talk to me?"
"I think so, just a second." I covered the phone with my hand. "Dork brain, 
phone!" I knew he was in his room as my door was open and he had to pass it to get to 
the stairs.
A moment later. "Who is it?"
"Heather."
"I got it."
He picked up the phone. "Hello?"
I should have hung up since that was the polite thing to do, but I wanted to know 
what was going on, if they were going to make up- the stuff he’d never tell me on his 
own and it could be days until I found out and who wanted to wait?
"Hi honey."
"Hi Heather."
"Are you still mad at me?"
"Are you still mad at me?"
"I don’t want to be mad at you."
There was a pause. "Hold on a second."
Whoops...
"Dorkface, get off the phone."
I quickly hung up and said, “I wasn’t.”
“Whatever.” he slammed his door and I dropped my head down onto the magazine. Oh well, I guess I’d have to wait.

At eight o’clock, nearly an hour later, he was still on the phone as I went down to watch TV with Dad. I usually could talk him into letting me stay up a little later on Thursdays if he was watching, too.
Mom sometimes watched and she was downstairs that night on the couch next to Dad. When I walked in she asked, “Is Chris still on the phone with Heather?”
“I think so,” I replied as I dropped onto the couch.
“Hopefully they’ll get it straightened out. And you’ve been in a better mood, I see.”
“Much.” I didn’t elaborate.
I guess Mom was content not to know any more right now since she didn’t press the issue.
About ten minutes later, Chris came downstairs. “Is it okay if I go over to Heather’s for a while?”
“Sure, but try to be home by ten, okay?”
“Sure.” he came into the family room to pick up his shoes.
When he sat down to put them, on Mom asked, “Did you work everything out?”
“Pretty much. She’s going to try and save money from her job to see if she can maybe go to Kentucky, too, but if she does go to IU and I don’t, we’re still going to date.”
“So do you want to visit Kentucky over spring break?” Dad wanted to know.
“Yeah, I guess so. Can Heather come too?”
“I think so,” Dad agreed.
Chris was smiling as he jogged out of the house. Maybe life wasn’t over after all.

Kelly was missing from school the next day. At lunch everyone talked to me again, but no one seemed to want to mention the whole thing with Kelly. Maybe they were embarrassed to have believed her, or maybe they still did. However no one acted like they were still upset except for Amy, but she was still okay.

In art class Mitch and I talked about Chris and Heather. It turns out that their parents agreed to give her whatever it would cost to go to IU toward going to Kentucky but she would have to make up the rest. This excited Mitch because maybe he’d get the chance to go to somewhere besides IU. Not that it was a bad school, but sometimes you’d like to get a little farther away than an hour out of Midbury.
But then again we live in a small town where I thought life was supposed to be less complicated. If the rest of the world is more complex than Midbury, I'm thinking that I may never leave.

"So, Sarah, how was art class minus Kelly today?" Stacy asked me after school as she pulled out her text books.

I smiled. "Oh, it was really great."

"Yeah?"

"Mitch was talking about how terrible Kelly was and how totally cruel she'd been to me."

"Well, of course."

"And then he said he couldn't imagine how anyone could ever say anything bad about me since I was one of the nicest girls he'd ever met."

Stacy stopped putting away her math book and turned to look straight at me.

"Nuh-uh!"

"Alex couldn't believe it either. I mean, he was giving Mitch this look."

Stacy laughed. "This is so awesome, except that maybe Kelly will think she's proven right if he..."

I didn't let her finish her statement. "Well, no she won't because he told me that he already told all of his friends that he never liked Kelly at all and she is a liar. I doubt if anyone will ever believe Kelly again!"

Stacy was loving it. "So then what!"

"Well," I was really getting into my story, now, "we both got our projects done early and were just sitting there with not much to do and then..."

"What?" Stacy had completely forgotten her books now and leaning in to get all the details.

"He took my hand and looked deeply into my eyes...."

"In art class!"

"Can you hold on a sec while I finish!"

"Sorry."

"He looked deeply into my eyes," I repeated for emphasis, "and asked me to sit with him at the game tonight."

Stacy was already dying and to add to my story, at that moment Mitch walked past and said, "Hey, see you at the game."

"Right, bye."

"Bye."

Stacy completely melted into her locker. "Oh my GOD! Sarah, you are the luckiest girl in the whole world. Two days ago your social life was in ruins and today the hottest guy in the eighth grade asks you to sit with him at the game."
I was wondering if I should let Stacy off the hook before she died of heart failure. "It sounds pretty good, doesn't it?"

"Good?" Stacy looked at me carefully, having recovered from her near faint. "It sounds dang near perfect...too perfect."

I busted out laughing. "It sure does."

"So...?" Stacy deflated.

"It's not all quite true..."

"How much of it is true?"

"I was all true up to where I said...okay so it was all a lie."

"Oh," Stacy swatted at me with her gloves. "You lie worse than Kelly Myers!"

"Hardly!" I was quite offended.

"Sorry," Stacy apologized. "I guess that was pretty unfair."

"I'd say so!"

"But it was so cruel of you, Sarah Westrom. You had me thinking that maybe one of us was going to get a real guy to like us before we got out of the seventh grade, but now it's all hopeless."

"No it's not," I adjusted my backpack on my shoulder. "He did say that he was mad at Kelly and we talked a lot about basketball and Chris and Heather."

Stacy seemed to get over her devastation and asked, "How is all that?"

I briefly explained the situation. "So I guess they won't be breaking up, which is good."

"Yeah, Heather is nice, and maybe she will get us that discount at Fashion Outlet!"

"In our dreams!"

"If you can dream about Mitch Hamilton staring deeply into your eyes and asking you out, I can dream about nice clothes."

"Maybe you should dream about Alex, Mitch's friend. I hear he and Katelin broke up."

"They break up every week." Stacy slammed her locker.

"Oh well," I smiled as we headed out into the frigid cold.

I arrived home and dropped all of my things off on the kitchen table. I would get them in a minute. But then I started thinking about Mitch and how I wished that what I'd told Stacy was really true and ran upstairs to get my last college Nancy Drew. Maybe Nancy and Jake could keep me company if Mitch wouldn't! I was a good chapter into the book, Keeping Secrets, when everything that had gone on this past week caught up with me and I felt asleep.
When we arrived at the gym that night, Stacy and I climbed to our usual seats. I couldn’t wait until Mitch arrived. Maybe he hadn’t held my hands and asked me to go to the game with him, but he had been pretty nice, so I guess maybe something… I don’t know!

As I attentively watched the door, Stacy teased me. “Looking for your boyfriend?”

“No…” I blushed, “I was just hoping that Kelly wouldn’t be here.”

“I seriously doubt she would show her face!”

“You never know about Kelly,” I reminded her.

Mitch arrived then. With Alex, Heather, and… was that Angela Simpson? No way!

“Oh no, is that who I think it is with Mitch?”

“I don’t remember her…”

“You know Angela Simpson. They went out at the beginning of the year. I thought that was over!”

“I guess not,” Stacy replied. “I guess Kelly was mad at the wrong person.”

“They’re holding hands!” I moaned. “Oh no…”

And she looked so pretty and perfect. How could I have ever thought that Mitch would like me?

Stacy didn’t say anything. She knew. I guess she’d been right. I guess we were meant to be losers.

Mitch and his group arrived to sit behind us. “Hey Sarah, hi Stacy.”

“Hi,” I muttered, and I could tell that Angela was thinking what a loser I was. He’s probably told her all about what a dork I’d been. He probably thought I was a loser.

“Sarah.” Who is that?

“It’s just not fair, Stacy.”

“Sarah!” The voice wasn’t in the gym with me.

I realized that it was my mom talking, and that I was in my bedroom, not the high school gym.

“Mom?”

“Sarah, honey, it’s time for dinner.”

“Dinner?”

“You fell asleep after school.” Mom sat on the edge of my bed and brushed the hair out of my eyes. “Long week?”

“Yeah,” I yawned and stretched.
“Well, we’re having fried chicken so you better get downstairs before your brother eats all of it.”

“Oh okay.” I smiled thinking that it had all been a terrible dream. Mitch wasn’t going out with Angela.

Mom got up to leave the room and then turned back. “Oh, and you left bag and coat on the table.”

“Sorry,” I replied sheepishly.

Mom didn’t sound really mad and I knew I’d gotten off easy this time. She usually got more upset than that. But she seemed in a good mood.

When we were driving to the game, I pinched myself to make sure this was all reality. With the way my life had been going this week it was important to keep track of what was the truth!

I couldn’t tell Stacy about my dream until we got to the game and split from my parents. I mean, you just didn’t talk about boys in front of your mom and dad!

“Did Mitch call and propose after school?” Stacy asked.

“Oh my gosh, he sure did!”

Stacy laughed as we took off our coats and sat down. “Your imagination is running wild again!”

“It certainly is, I took a nap after school and I had this dream that Mitch showed up at the game with Angela Simpson!”

“That girl he dated at the beginning of the year? No way!”

“Yeah, it made me really depressed.”

“I’ll bet, after you were expecting a proposal and all.”

“Whatever.”

“Don’t whatever me, I’m just going by what you’re telling me!”

I shook my head. “I can dream, can’t I?”

“I guess as long as I’m waiting for Leonardo DiCaprio, you can wait for Mitch.”

I couldn’t tell Stacy that she had no chance with Leonardo, as he was nearly 10 years older than us and was probably already dating a super model, but I wouldn’t do that to her. Who knew. Maybe he liked younger girls, and when she was 18, he wouldn’t even be 30, see, no problem.

I laughed at my own logic, and Stacy was about to say something when Mitch arrived. Alex was following Heather and Mitch. Alex usually came with Katelin’s parents. Maybe the rumor was true!

“Hey, Alex is not with Katelin!”

Stacy smiled. “One guy smiles at you and suddenly you’re the matchmaker of the world.”
“Hey, I was reading some of that college Nancy Drew and one of her friends was dating this guy who...”

“Now you’re getting dating advice from Nancy Drew!”

I stopped talking. Okay, so maybe last week I’d been complaining about them and all but...

The conversation ended when Mitch and Alex reached us.

“Hey girls.”

“Hi,” I smiled.

“Did you fix your hair tonight Sarah Westrom?” Stacy whispered in my ear and I turned bright red.

Fortunately, the guys had gone to sit behind us and they didn’t see I was blushing.

“Hey Sarah, Heather said the Kentucky scout was probably going to be here tonight, is Chris nervous?” Mitch asked me.

I couldn’t very well ignore his direct question, now could I? “ Yeah, a little bit, but he’s excited.”

From that point on I was half turned around talking to them. Mitch really was a nice guy, I could see why Kelly had wanted him so bad. Well, not bad enough to be so cruel to a friend, but I wasn’t Kelly.

Mitch even shared his popcorn with me in the second half as our team totally ran over the other team. Chris played very well and I was very happy for him. Hopefully he’d get to go to Kentucky. Though I still kind of wished he’d go to IU so I could go to the games. I wondered if Mom and Dad would let me bring Mitch. What was I thinking! It wasn’t like that!

But you never knew...

After the game, Heather came down to talk to Chris with my parents and me. Mitch had stayed behind and was talking to some other people. But Angela Simpson hadn’t even been at the game. I’d checked.

Dad had been watching the scouts, or at least who he’d assumed to be the scouts, and said they seemed happy.

“ We’re all going out for pizza,” Chris told Mom after they’d discussed the game.

“That’s fine,” Mom said, even though it was something they did after just about every Friday game. “ It was good to talk to you again, Heather.”

“Thank you. I’ll make sure Chris is home at a decent hour, Mrs. Westrom.”

“You do that,” Mom smiled. I knew she liked Heather just as much as I did.

Dad put his arm around me as we walked about. “ Been a crazy week, hasn’t it kiddo?”
“You bet,” I replied. He didn’t know the half of it. “Hopefully next week will be calmer.”

“It has to be!” Stacy spoke up. “I can’t handle any more excitement!”

“Enjoy the craziness of school while you can,” Dad advised, “real life is even crazier.”

I looked at Stacy and smiled. I couldn’t imagine anything worse than Kelly Myers!
Reflection:

I chose the format of my thesis as an attempt to focus myself as a writer. I have been interested in being a writer for eight years. However, until this point I only worked on pieces for class that were graded and forgotten or things I wrote for myself and friends would read and then they would be forgotten. With my thesis I wanted to get down to it and write something and work on it and rewrite it and attack it until it was something that really sounded good not only to me but also to a larger audience.

The subject and intended audience of my thesis was middle school students because I felt this was something I really knew. For the past three and a half years I have known I wanted to teach, and recently that desire has been focused to teaching middle school. Therefore, for the purposes of both of my educational goals, to be both a writer and a teacher, writing this story seemed the perfect way to sum up my education at Ball State.

At first I was a little scared about the whole idea. What if I wasn’t good enough? I want to write. Writing is something that just is what I am. I love to write, it makes me feel good about myself to write, and as far as class work is concerned, I have always been a good writer. But what about fiction writing? I know I can write a story in two days that would amuse my friends, and they make me feel like the world’s greatest author. But revision has never been something I paid much attention to. My fiction writing was usually done on the first try and unless there was a serious hole in the plot line, it stayed the way it was. I never revised, and I wasn’t sure I would be any good at it. I went into this project with an open mind about revising. I was going to write and re-write it until it shone. It sounded good, but was I going to give up on it or myself?

Much to my amazement and delight, I got the greatest rush out of reworking my story. “Okay, this doesn’t work, what should I add, what should I delete? Would she say that?” As I worked, my characters became real to me, and I found I really liked them.
Things kept falling into place. For example, I hated the ending to the story at first. It didn’t work; it wasn’t right. But through rewritting and the help of my advisor, things fell into place. Now I love the way it ends. It leaves promise for so much more. My characters have a million things left to do. Every day I think of another thing that Sarah could do in the next story. This story could do even more, but at the moment, it works for me, and I think it is ready to be finished as my thesis.

This is the point where I hope that I continue to grow as an author. It should not end with my thesis. I want to do more and write more. I have come a long way as a writer now that I know I have the skills, the patience, and the drive to be a good writer. Now I need to write on my own. I won’t have a formal advisor whom I can ask for advice, but friends and family have been willing to help me revise. Someday I will have my own editor with nothing else in the world except to help me revise and rethink my writing, but until then I have to be my own editor and keep myself writing.

My only regret about my thesis is that I did not have the chance to share my writing with middle school students. I would like to see if it would appeal to them or not. Hopefully, when I student teach next semester, I will have the opportunity to share what I have written with my students. I feel that a middle school student could give me a real honest opinion, and after all, if it doesn’t appeal to them as the intended audience, I will know I still have a long way to go. It is a journey I think I will enjoy.