

LIBRIS

We know
books

Also by E. Lockhart:

THE BOYFRIEND LIST

THE BOY BOOK

Visit E. Lockhart on the web at:
www.theboyfriendlist.com

e. l o c k h a r t

fly on the Wall

CORGI BOOKS

LIBRIS

We know
books

part one

**life as an
artificial redhead**

friday. I am eating alone in the lunchroom.

Again.

Ever since Katya started smoking cigarettes, she's hanging out back by the garbage cans, lighting up with the Art Rats. She bags her lunch, so she takes it out there and eats potato chips in a haze of nicotine.

I hate smoking, and the Art Rats make me nervous. So here I am: in my favorite corner of the lunchroom, sitting on the floor with my back against the wall. I'm eating fries off a tray and drawing my own stuff—not anything for class.

Quadriceps. Quadriceps.

Knee.

Calf muscle.

Dull point; must sharpen pencil.

Hell! Pencil dust in fries.

Whatever. They still taste okay.

Calf muscle.

Ankle.

Foot.

KA-POW! Spider-Man smacks Doctor Octopus off the edge of the building with a swift kick to the jaw. Ock's face contorts as he falls backward, his metal tentacles flailing with hysterical fear. He has an eighty-story fall beneath him, and—

Spidey has a great physique. Built, but not too built. Even if I did draw him myself.

I think I made his butt too small.

Do-over.

I wish I had my pink eraser, I don't like this white one.

Butt.

Butt.

Connecting to: leg . . . and . . . quadriceps.

There. A finished Spidey outline. I have to add the suit.

And some shadowing. And the details of the building. Then fill in the rest of Doc Ock as he hurtles off the edge.

Mmmm. French fries.

Hell again! Ketchup on Spidey.

Lick it off.

Cammie Holmes is staring at me like I'm some lower form of life.

"What are you looking at?" I mutter.

"Nothing."

"Then. Stop. Staring," I say, sharpening my pencil again, though it doesn't need it.

This Cammie is all biscuits. She's stacked like a character in a comic book. Cantaloupes are strapped to her chest.

Her only redeeming quality.

"Why are you licking your Superman drawing?" Cammie tips her nose up. "That's so kinky. I mean, I've heard of licking a centerfold, but licking Superman?"

"Spider."

"What?"

"Spider-Man."

"Whatever. Get a life, Gretchen."

She's gone. From across the lunchroom comes her nasal voice: "Taffy, get this: I just caught Gretchen Yee giving oral to some Superman drawing she made."

Spider. Spider. Spider-Man.

"She would." Taffy Johnson. Stupid tinkly laugh.

Superman is a big meathead. I'd never draw Superman. Much less give him oral.

I haven't given anybody oral, anyway.

I hate those girls.

Taffy is doing splits in the middle of the lunchroom floor, which is just gross. Who wants to see her crotch like that? Though of course everybody does, and even if they didn't, she wouldn't care because she's such a unique spirit or whatever.

I hate those girls, and I hate this place: the Manhattan High School for the Arts. Also known as Ma-Ha.

Supposedly, it's a magnet high school for students talented in drawing, painting, sculpture or photography. You have to submit a portfolio to get in, and when I did mine (which was all filled with inks of comic-book characters I taught myself to draw in junior high) and when I finally got my acceptance letter, my parents

were really excited. But once you're here, it's nothing but an old, ugly New York public school building, with angry teachers and crap facilities like any other city public school—except I've got drawing class every day, painting once a week and art history twice. I'm in the drawing program.

Socially, Ma-Ha is like the terrible opposite of the schools you see on television, where everyone wants to be the same as everyone else. On TV, if you don't conform and wear what the popular kids are wearing, and talk like they talk, and act like they do—then you're a pariah.

Here, everyone wants to be different.

People have mohawks and dreadlocks and outrageous thrift-store clothes; no one would be caught dead in ordinary jeans and a T-shirt, because they're all so into expressing their individuality. A girl from the sculpture program wears a sari every day, even though her family's Scandinavian. There's that kid who's always got that Pink Panther doll sticking out of her jacket pocket; the boy who smokes using a cigarette holder like they did in forties movies; a girl who's shaved her head and pierced her cheeks; Taffy, who does Martha Graham-technique modern dance and wears her leotard and sweats all day; and Cammie, who squeezes herself into tight goth outfits and paints her lips vampire red.

They all fit in here, or take pride in not fitting in, if

that makes any sense—and if you're an ordinary person you've got to do *something* at least, like dye your hair a strange color, because nothing is scorned so much as normalcy. Everyone's a budding genius of the art scene; everyone's on the verge of a breakthrough. If you're a regular-looking person with regular likes and dislikes and regular clothes,

and you can draw so it looks like the art in a comic book,

but you can't "express your interior life on the page," according to Kensington (my drawing teacher),

and if you can't "draw what you see, rather than imitate what's in that third-rate trash you like to read" (Kensington again),

then you're nothing at Ma-Ha.

Nothing. That's me.

Gretchen Kaufman Yee. Ordinary girl.

Two months ago I capitulated to nonconformity-conformity and had my hair bleached white and then dyed stop-sign red. It cost sixty dollars and it pissed off my mother, but it didn't work.

I'm still ordinary.

I take literature second period with Glazer. I rarely do the reading. I don't like to admit that about myself; I'd like to be the person who does the reading—but I don't.

It seems like I've always got some new comic to read on the subway, and the homework for drawing is more interesting.

In literature, I can't concentrate because Titus Antonakos sits next to me at the big rectangular table. He's an Art Rat, meaning he's one of the boys in the sophomore drawing program, group B. He's delicious and smart and graceful and hot. White skin, with high cheekbones and messy dark hair. Lips like a Greek statue—a little too full for the rest of his face. He's got a retro Johnny Rotten look; today he's wearing a green vinyl jacket, an ironic "I heart New York" T-shirt, jeans and combat boots. He's thin to the point that he's off some other girls' radar, but not mine.

He is absolutely on my radar.

Titus.

Titus.

Titus.

Touch my arm by accident like you did yesterday.

Notice me.

Notice me.

"Gretchen?" It's Glazer.

"Huh?"

"Vermin." She's obviously repeating herself. She sounds annoyed. "The word. I asked you to define it."

"It's a bug, right?" I say. "Like a cockroach."

"It can be," says Glazer, smirking. "Most people do assume that Kafka had his protagonist, Gregor Samsa, turn into a cockroach. That's the standard interpretation of 'The Metamorphosis.' But if you all turn to page five, you'll see that the word Kafka used in German—and the word in our translation—is not *cockroach* or *bug*, but *vermin*—a 'monstrous vermin,' Kafka says—which can be taken to mean any kind of animal, especially those that are noxious or repellent in some way: rats, mice, lice, flies, squirrels."

No idea what she is talking about. I just know the story is about some guy who turns into a bug.

Whatever.

Titus.

Titus.

Titus.

God, he smells good.

"Titus?" Glazer, calling on him. He actually put his hand up.

"Doesn't it also mean disgusting *people*?" Titus says. "Like you could say people who—I don't know—molest kids or steal from their mothers—they're vermin."

"Absolutely." Glazer lights up. "And by extension, you sometimes see the word used as a derogatory term for the masses—for large groups of ordinary people. Or for prisoners. It expresses contempt. Now: why would