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Dear Lisi Harrison,

What is it about girls? What makes us so devilish, so shameless, and so mean? Starting as early as grade school is constant drama, drama, and more drama. Imagine, you move to a brand new school, and you have to leave all your childhood friends behind. You don't know a soul in this strange place, and the girls your mom promised would be your friends in no time look at you like you've just been zapped in from Mars. There's something about girls where they take pleasure in knowing they're above you. They know you will give anything to fit in and be their friend, but it's that ability, that power they take comfort in, knowing they control your reputation. Sound evil? It is, and that's just the beginning.

In your book, *The Clique*, a reader, especially a male, would think you've exaggerated girls' cruelty. But the truth is, you didn't. No, you used some pretty average girls, maybe a little richer than most, but nonetheless normal middle school girls trying to keep their heads up in the sea of insults, criticism, and backstabbing. Your book is so real, so truthful in expressing how incredibly mean girls really are. I don't think I've ever connected so realistically to a book before. I've never actually moved to a completely new school where I didn't know anyone, but I have experienced something very similar. The switch from little ol' Saint Mary's Elementary School to the big bad West Delaware Middle School was an experience I'll never forget. Entering a school where I knew only a handful of students and didn't quite know the 'ropes,' was probably one of the most terrifying things I've ever had to do.

It began ever so subtly, but snowballed into something huge. Making friends is step one, keeping them is a whole different story. Your character Claire reminds me a lot of myself. She started out as the nice girl everyone stepped on, and she became the expert commotion handler. After so many tears you've cried, you get stronger, your heart gets tougher, and handling affliction isn't as difficult, the way your lip gets numb to pain after you've had braces on for awhile. Claire was snapped at, humiliated, and verbally abused by the popular girls at her school.

The time when I was in the most pain was when I first began to think that I finally fit in with those 'cool' girls. I made friends with Miss Popular at last. But that soon turned into a train wreck. I guess Miss Popular started to take me as a threat, and she didn't want me to get above her on the social ladder. So one night, I signed onto my Instant Messenger, and my so-called 'friend' was on. I didn't know anything was wrong, so I began to joke with her, a smile across my face the whole time, knowing I finally had a friend people were jealous of. But she blew up on me. She told me I really had no friends, and everyone hated me. She said the only reason she and everyone else were pretending to be friends was out of sympathy. Right then, I felt my heart burst. It hurts, and it's a pain I have no idea how to even begin to describe. It's like being in a cold, dark room with no sound and no happiness, nothing but the tears streaming down your

face and the sound of your own sobs. The worst thing about being in this place is you know there's something better, something everyone else gets but you, something you're totally alienated from. That something is friendship, happiness, and above all, love.

Your book changed me, Ms. Harrison. I realized the struggle and burden all young girls have to carry. Luckily, there was one girl who stayed by my side to wipe my tears and get me back on my feet. She is still my very best friend today, and we're closer than sisters. After I made some real friends and stopped worrying about the mean girls, I forgot about the poor souls still going through what I did. But after reading your novel, I feel it's my duty, my responsibility, to aid them in their journey to high school harmony. Never should anyone have to go through school unhappy because that's how others want you to be. We have to stand up for ourselves, stand up for others, and protect each other. We have to reach out to those in the agony of loneliness, the ones trapped in a dark room that I narrowly escaped from. No one, no matter what they look like or where they came from, should have to be alone.

Yours truly,
Katie Kunkel

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