

## Black, White and Red Masks

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Let me tell you about my life right now, I live in a new town, in a new house and I'm going to attend a new school. Oh, did I mention that I'm starting my new high school in the middle of the second semester? Well, once again my parents dragged me to another town for their jobs. And in just a few moments, I'll be entering my new school in Edwardsville, Illinois. Didn't know that city existed? Well neither did I, until my parents told me we were moving.

Anyways, when I entered the school's office the secretary gave me my schedule, my locker number and a map of the school. The first thing I noticed when I opened my locker was the awful smell that came out of it. *What died in here?*

"So you're the new kid," said a voice behind me. I turned around to see a boy with sandy brown hair and hazel eyes. He was alone. *Brave*. Usually it takes at least two days or more until someone actually notices the new kid.

"Yeah, that's me," I replied.

"Well, my name is Dave."

"I'm Liza," I said and began walking away. Dave quickly caught up to me.

"So Liza what classes do you have?"

"Hold on let me check," I pulled out my schedule. "I have English with Mr. Harvey, Biochemistry with Mrs. Lane, Physics with Ms. Collins and then Spanish with Mr. Thomas."

"We have biochemistry and Spanish together."

"That's cool. Well, you've been here longer than I have, do you know where Room 217 is?"

“Yeah sure it’s down the hall and it’s the last door to your right.” I had a feeling that Dave was about to offer to walk me to class, but luckily the bell for first period rang. I thanked him and headed down the hall before he made his suggestion.

Fortunately neither the teacher nor most of the students weren’t there so hopefully I wouldn’t have to suffer from the awkward ‘Here’s the new kid’ introduction in front of the class. I found an empty seat at the back and with any luck no one would really notice that I’m here.

I was doodling on my binder when someone tapped my shoulder. I looked up to see a girl wearing very bright, colourful clothes and had a curly mess of red hair on her head. “You’re in my seat,” she said with a nasty tone. *Mean girl*, I thought.

I said, “Sorry” and quickly got up to find a new seat. Before I could take another step, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was the colourful girl again. She was giggling and smiled, “I’m joking. Actually, this is my seat but no one sits beside me so you can sit there if you want.” She sat at her desk and turned back to me. “Don’t worry, I’m not really a mean girl, I swear.”

I felt relieved. I slowly walked around her and sat in the chair beside her.

“So, I’m guessing you’re new here,” she said.

I wonder how many times I’m going to hear that today. “Yup,” I sighed. I looked around to see the teacher and more and more students coming in.

“Well, I’m Kate and as you can see,” she pointed at her clothes, “I’m into fashion.”

“I’m Liza and I have to say, your clothes are really bright.”

“Thanks. I make most of my clothes and accessories.”

I was about to say something, but I was cut off by the PA system.

“Good morning students. Today is a new day so let’s make it a good day!!” The person who did the announcements sounded annoyingly cheerful. “First of all, I would like to broadcast

that the annual Black, White and Red dance is coming up soon. Your homeroom teachers will receive the boxes full of ping pong balls tomorrow morning.” *Ping pong balls, a dance?* It was so weird that it left me dwelling on the fact that I didn’t know what they were talking about.

Meanwhile, Kate was giggling beside me. I turned to ask her what the dance was about, but she read my mind and explained it to me as the announcements droned on. “Near the end of each year, our school has the Black, White and Red dance. It’s basically a semi-formal dance, but it’s so much more. During the dance there’s a small competition for spring fling king and queen and everyone has to wear masks it’s so much fun!”

“Ms Blakeley,” Mr Harvey called, “do you have anything to share?”

Kate looked up at him and said, “No Mr Harvey, I don’t.”

He went back to his lecture. Kate whispered to me, “Sit with me and my friend at lunch and we’ll explain everything.”



When I entered the cafeteria, I immediately saw a boy with blond hair stuffing his face with chilli dogs right after flirting with a girl who I thought was a senior. *Must be a popular guy, or someone who thinks he is.*

It wasn’t hard to spot Kate in the cafeteria. She was the brightest person – colour-wise – in there. Surprisingly, I saw Dave there. He didn’t notice me when I sat beside him. “So what’s this dance?”

Dave’s face lit up when he saw me. I noticed how mesmerising his eyes were when he smiled. “Hey Liza!” he said excitedly.

“Hey Dave.” I turned to Kate, and said “I didn’t know you guys were friends.”

“Our families have been friends since we were two. This kid is like my brother,” she said while pinching his cheek.

“Okay, ouch,” Dave said when she finally let go. “To answer your question it’s a dance.”

I rolled my eyes. “Yeah I got that Einstein. Details please.”

Kate patted Dave’s shoulder. “I can take it from here. Like I said during English, it’s spring fling with masks and everyone must only wear black, white or red, depending on what colour ping pong ball you get.”

“Ping pong ball?” I questioned while taking a bite of pizza.

That was when Dave jumped in. “The spring fling committee sends out a box of red, white and red ping pong balls to each of the homerooms throughout the school. The students are to choose randomly and they cannot trade them because the teacher records the colour each student picked.”

“If you pull out a white ball, you wear white. If you get black, wear black,” Kate continued.

“And if you pull out red you wear red?” I suggested.

It was Dave’s turn again. “Yes, but only ten people in the entire school will wear red.”

“Why?”

“That’s how they choose the contestants for spring fling king and queen. The few lucky people in red can’t tell anyone if they have a red ping pong ball or their identity during the dance, otherwise they will be taken out of the race for the crown,” Kate answered.

“The best part about it, it that at the end of the night everyone votes on who they want to be king and queen, and since everyone must keep their mask on until the crowning, everyone votes on the contestant’s personality and not on their social status,” Dave chimed in.

“I get it now.” I said while finishing the rest of my pizza. “Well, I wouldn’t want to get a red ball, too much attention.”

“Why not!” Kate exclaimed. “It would be so much fun! Think of being one of the ten who stand out in a sea of black and white. That would be amazing!”

“Not for me,” I said.

Dave agreed with me, “Same here. My twin brother does enough of standing out for the both of us. He’s the guy over there,” he pointed to the guy who was eating the chilli dogs earlier. This time he was surrounded by girls. “I obviously got the smarts and he got the charm.”

“I don’t really think so,” I commented. That was when the bell rang for the next period.



The next day was the day the ping pong balls came into homeroom. Mr. Harvey called everyone up one-by-one to get their chance at school royalty. Kate seemed pretty down when she came back from the teacher’s desk I guess she didn’t get a red ball, but after a few seconds, she perked right up. She was probably thinking of fashion choices for the dance. Mr. Harvey disturbed my thoughts when he called me up. *Time to get this over with.* I put my hand in a blacked-out box and pulled it right out when I felt the first ping pong ball. I wasn’t really paying attention when I showed it to the teacher so you can imagine my surprise when he said “Interesting...Good luck.”

I looked down at my hand and saw a red ping pong ball.