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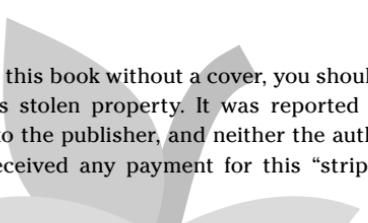
# Her Evil Twin

by Mimi McCoy



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# Her Evil Twin





# Chapter One

The note landed on Anna Dipalo's desk halfway through English class. It was written on regular lined notebook paper and folded into a tidy, tight little triangle. Penciled across the front in neat box letters were the words FOR ANNA (PRIVATE!).

Anna glanced up at the front of the classroom. Her English teacher was busy diagramming a ridiculous sentence about someone named Percival and his pet parakeet, so Anna slid the note into her lap and unfolded it. It read:

You have been chosen.  
Meet in the old girls' bathroom behind the gym.  
3:10 p.m. Don't be late.

The note was unsigned. Anna glanced around the classroom. Other kids were sneaking glances at their cell phones, doodling in their notebooks, or staring vacantly into space. There was no clue where it had come from.

Anna carefully refolded the note and was about to slip it into the pocket of her jeans when she saw that Jessamyn Ito was twisted around in her seat, looking right at her. When their eyes met, Jessamyn gave a tiny nod. Then she turned back around and faced the chalkboard as if nothing had happened.

Anna felt a rush of excitement that went all the way down to the tips of her toes. Jessamyn was one of the coolest girls in the seventh grade at Woodrow Wilson Junior High. And now she'd chosen Anna. For what, Anna didn't know yet. But she couldn't wait to find out.

At lunchtime, Anna showed the note to her best friend, Dory Welch. She reasoned that the note hadn't *specifically* said not to show it to anyone. And besides, she told Dory everything.

Dory read it through twice while she ate a cheese sandwich. When she was done, she set down the

sandwich and pushed her glasses up on her nose. Dory wore big, round glasses with thick lenses. They made her hazel eyes look huge.

“I don’t know,” Dory said.

This was not the response Anna had been expecting. “What do you mean, you don’t know?”

“I mean, I don’t know if you should go. It might be a trick,” Dory replied.

Anna frowned. “A trick?”

“Remember at the beginning of the year when Jessamyn and her friends gave Claudia Wheaton a free cherry slushie — with ketchup and mustard mixed in?”

How could Anna forget? Claudia had drunk three giant gulps before she’d realized, and then she’d gotten violently sick all over the cafeteria floor. Everyone had talked about it for days afterward.

“Okay, that was kind of mean,” Anna admitted. “But Claudia shouldn’t eat every single thing that gets put in front of her.” She didn’t say what she was really thinking, which was, *But Claudia is a dork. And I’m not.*

“It says here you’re chosen,” Dory said, pointing to the line in the note, “but it doesn’t say what for. Don’t you think that’s a little weird?”

“Well, obviously they want me to join a club or something,” Anna said impatiently. She was starting to regret showing it to Dory.

“Why would Jessamyn choose you to join a club?” Dory asked. “It’s not like you’re friends.”

The question irked Anna. “We’re not *not* friends,” she pointed out. “Maybe she just thinks I’m cool.”

“If you say so.” Dory shrugged and handed the note back, then took another bite of her sandwich.

*What do you know about cool, anyway?* Anna wanted to snap. *You’ve had the same haircut since third grade. And you have a blob of mayonnaise on your cheek.* Dory was definitely not the final authority on cool.

“Just forget it.” Anna folded up the note and put it back in her pocket.

Dory absently rubbed her knuckles against her left collarbone. When Dory and Anna were little, Dory had fallen down the stairs at Anna’s house and broken her collarbone, and there was still a visible bump where it had grown together unevenly. Dory was in the habit of rubbing this spot when she was thinking hard about something.

“Why do you think she wants to meet you in the old girls’ bathroom?” she asked, clearly not ready to forget it.

Anna had wondered the same thing. The old girls’ bathroom was located in a hallway between the main school building and the new gym. Not many people used it because it was dark and windowless; there were bigger, nicer bathrooms in the girls’ locker room. Also, there were weird rumors about the old bathroom. Some kids swore it was haunted.

Anna had never heard any proof that the rumors were true, but the bathroom gave her the creeps all the same. She often found herself walking extra fast when she had to go by it. But she didn’t want to admit to Dory that she was afraid.

“Probably because it’s private,” she said with a shrug. “Can we just forget it now?”

“Sure, whatever,” said Dory. “Hey, so I’ve been thinking about our Halloween costume, and I’ve got it: toothbrush and toothpaste.”

Anna and Dory always made their Halloween costumes together. In fact, Anna couldn’t remember a Halloween where she hadn’t dressed up with Dory.

Over the years they'd been fairy princesses, two black cats, M&M'S, twin witches, and a two-headed monster.

But a toothbrush and toothpaste? Anna raised her eyebrows. "Explain, please?"

"I got the idea when I was at the hardware store with my dad," Dory said. "See, one of us gets a scrub brush and wears it on the side of her head like toothbrush bristles. And the other one can wear a lampshade on her head — that's the toothpaste cap." Dory beamed, clearly pleased with her idea.

But Anna wrinkled her nose. "Dory, we're going to a Halloween *dance*, remember? Who's going to want to dance with a girl wearing a scrub brush on her head?"

"Oh." Dory's face fell. "I didn't think of that."

Anna sighed to herself. Sometimes it seemed to her that Dory still thought they were in grade school, where you could dress up like a toothbrush and people would think it was cute. In fact, when it came right down to it, Dory hadn't changed a bit since fourth grade. She still wore her hair in barrettes, brought her lunch in Tupperware containers, and talked about her pet hamsters as if they were real people. She still collected *rocks*, for Pete's sake.

Anna often found herself wishing that Dory would make just a little more effort to be *cool*.

Anna glanced over at the table in the center of the cafeteria, where Jessamyn was sitting with her BFFs, Kima and Lauren. Jessamyn laughed at something one of them was saying, swiping a lock of glossy black hair out of her eyes with a casual gesture that seemed glamorous to Anna.

Right from the first day of school, it had been clear that Jessamyn was glamorous. Even though she'd been just as new as every other seventh grader, she had known where to sit, who to talk to, and how to dress. It was like Jessamyn had been *born cool*, Anna thought.

Anna realized Dory was saying something to her. "What?" she asked, shifting her gaze back to her friend.

"I said, if you want I can go with you. To meet Jessamyn after school today," Dory replied.

"Oh." Anna hesitated. Jessamyn's note hadn't said anything about bringing a friend. But she and Dory always did everything together. Maybe this was exactly what Dory needed. But on the other hand, what if Jessamyn decided not to let Anna into the club because of Dory?

As Anna went back and forth, the bell rang. She stood up and dumped her lunch tray into the trash while Dory stacked up her Tupperware containers.

“Okay,” Anna decided at last. “I’d like it if you came with me.”

Dory nodded. “Okay.”

“By the way,” Anna added. “You’ve got something here.” She tapped the corner of her mouth.

Dory grabbed a napkin and swiped away the offending blob of mayonnaise. Then she grinned. “Thanks, Anna.”

At 3:09 P.M., Anna stood by her locker, nervously combing her fingers through her bangs. She had dark brown hair that she wore every day in two thick braids. The braids were something Anna was trying out. She’d read in a teen beauty magazine that every girl should have a signature look, whether it was a sharp haircut or a special color. At the start of seventh grade, the braids had seemed cute and sassy, something to make her stand out.

But now, gazing at herself in the mirror on her locker door, Anna wasn’t so sure. She wished she had long, swishable hair like Jessamyn. She considered

undoing the braids, decided it would take too long, and instead tried sweeping her bangs away from her face with the graceful gesture she'd seen Jessamyn use. They just fell back into her eyes.

Anna sighed. Her brown eyes gazed back at her from the mirror, full of doubt.

Someone tapped her shoulder. Anna jumped, and spun around.

"Hey," said Dory. She had on her backpack, which sagged with homework, and a yellow windbreaker that was two sizes too big.

Anna eyed Dory's backpack, which she was wearing on both shoulders as usual. Nobody in junior high wore their backpack on both shoulders — at least, nobody cool did. Anna opened her mouth to say something, then decided against it. She was glad Dory was coming with her, after all.

"Ready?" Dory asked. Anna nodded.

They made their way down the stairs, then turned toward the gymnasium. Wilson was shaped like a squared-off U, with the cafeteria and gymnasium forming separate wings off the main building.

They stopped in front of the old girls' bathroom. Anna glanced at Dory one more time, took a deep breath, then pulled open the door.

The room was dark. "Um, hello?" Anna said.

"Come in," said a voice from somewhere in the darkness. "Close the door."

Anna and Dory stepped inside and let the door swing shut behind them. Because there were no windows, the room was almost completely black. The only light came from a crack under the door.

Anna gave a little yelp as a light came on, illuminating a frightening face. It took her a second to realize it was Jessamyn. She was standing against the far wall, holding a flashlight under her chin to light up her face in a spooky way. Anna could see two figures standing on either side of her. Kima and Lauren.

Jessamyn swung the beam onto Dory's face like a spotlight. "What's she doing here?" she asked Anna sharply.

"She — she's my friend. I told her she could come," Anna stuttered.

One of the other girls — Lauren, Anna thought — stepped forward. "She's not supposed to be here —"

Jessamyn cut her off. "That's all right. The more the merrier." Anna thought she heard a smile in her voice. But at once, she became serious again.

Swinging the flashlight beam onto Anna, she asked, “Do you know why you’re here?”

The light was blinding. Anna held up a hand to shield her eyes. “The note. It said I was chosen. . . .”

“That’s right,” said Jessamyn. “You have been specially chosen by me to be part of a secret club. Do you accept?”

Anna was about to say yes, but before she could, Dory broke in. “What is the club, exactly?”

There was a pause, as if Jessamyn was deciding how to answer. “I can’t tell you. All the members are sworn to secrecy. You have to join first. Are you in or are you out?”

“In,” Anna said promptly. She nudged Dory, who, after a moment’s hesitation echoed, “In.”

“Good.” Jessamyn nodded. “But first you must go through the initiation.”

“Initiation?” Anna asked with a shiver. All the darkness and secrecy were starting to get to her. Why couldn’t they just turn on the lights?

Kima spoke up. “To be in the club, you must pass a test. You must face the spirits.”

“How do you do that?” Anna’s voice came out in a squeak.

“You have to look into the mirror and call on them,” Lauren said. “If they say so, you can be in the club.” She paused then added dramatically, “But if they don’t like you, they could kill you.”

Anna gulped so loudly she was sure everyone in the room had heard.

“This is stupid!” Dory suddenly burst out.

Anna turned to her friend with a gasp. *Shut up, Dory!* she thought in horror. She was going to ruin everything!

Jessamyn swung the flashlight beam onto Dory, who blinked in the sudden light. “Are you afraid?” she asked coolly.

“No,” Dory snapped. “I think you’re playing some dumb game, and I’m not interested. Come on, Anna.” She turned to leave.

But Anna didn’t move. Hadn’t she been longing for something like this — something exciting, something to set her apart from the rest of the kids at Wilson? She wasn’t willing to give it up so quickly.

Dory made a noise of disbelief or frustration, Anna couldn’t tell which. They heard her stumble as she groped for the door. Then it swung open and closed, and Dory was gone.

“Sure you don’t want to follow your lame friend?”  
Jessamyn asked Anna.

“No,” said Anna. “I’m ready.”

Jessamyn led her over to the mirror and handed her the flashlight. She showed her how to hold it under her chin. Held at that angle, light carved Anna’s face with eerie shadows.

“Now, look into the mirror and say, ‘Spirit in the mirror, I call on thee, come tell us what is to be.’”

“Spirit in the mirror, I call on thee . . .” Anna repeated. Her voice sounded high and uncertain. Behind her, she heard someone giggle.

Suddenly, Anna felt a flicker of doubt. What if Dory was right? Was this all a game, just some big joke?

“Don’t stop!” Jessamyn commanded. “Look into the mirror. Keep repeating it.”

“Come tell us what is to be.” Anna sensed movement in the darkness behind her. What were they *doing*?

She didn’t have time to wonder . . . because something was happening in the mirror. Her reflection was *changing*.

A face was emerging from the mirror’s depths, like a swimmer surfacing through water. Little by

little, its features took shape. Anna's heart gave a leap of joyful recognition, followed by a stab of fear.

The flashlight fell from her hand. Anna swayed, clutching the edge of the sink for balance as the room swung around her.

Distantly, as if from miles away, she heard Lauren say, "Look at her. What's *wrong* with her?" Then everything went black.