

**T**he week before winter break, I drove my best friend Janine home from school every day. She'd applied early to Stanford, and waiting to hear whether she had been accepted was making her crazy. I'd try to distract her during the drive, blabbing on about what we should do for New Year's Eve (three years in Ron Weiner's basement seemed like enough). But once my Toyota turned onto Orchard Street and her mailbox came into sight, it was no use. I'd tell her how smart, how deserving, how phenomenally cool she was—that it would be Stanford's loss if she didn't get in. But day after day, there was no word.

Then, on a Thursday, it came: a thick first-class package with crests all over it. We ran into Janine's house to tell her parents, whose excitement made it seem as if she'd been elected President. They opened champagne and called the grandparents. I hung around until Janine's boyfriend came over with red and white roses. Then I headed home to study calculus. For those of us who hadn't applied early to college, grades still counted.

The next day Janine was a school celebrity. Everybody said they'd known all along. Not that it took a crystal ball: She was Earth Awareness president, field hockey team captain, a homeless shelter volunteer. You could almost see the halo glowing over her head. These were the reasons why I admired her. She deserved her success.

That's what I told myself, anyway, as Janine got interviewed by the school paper. Yup, that's my pal Supergirl. Yup, I'm sure tickled that she's getting all this recognition. Yup, 100 percent thrilled. Overjoyed. That's me.

The smile plastered on my face was not convincing. But admitting that I was jealous felt as mature as admitting that I wet my bed (yeah, right). I figured that everybody in our class was feeling a twinge of Wish it were me—but what I was feeling for Janine was something more like Wish it weren't you.

I confess, this was not my first brush with the green-eyed monster. The Esprit chambray jumper Liz Cook wore on the first day of fifth grade is still emblazoned on my memory, down to the red-bandanna trim. But that was a back-to-school outfit, and being envious of your friend's dress is more forgivable than being envious of her life.

I thought about revealing my true sentiments to Janine. But what would I say? "I can't stand it that you're the center of attention. Your accomplishments make me ill. P.S. Do not forget that I scored higher on the SATs"? That wasn't my style. So I let it lie.

I'd resisted the urge to throw a temper tantrum on the floor—when a few days later, I was smacked with another outrageous injustice. After breaking down and declaring the Ron Weiner Basement Fête<sup>1</sup> my New Year's Eve destination of choice, I got a call from my friend Tristanne—on the morning of the big night—so excited, she was hyperventilating.

"Dave Spiegel invited me over tonight to watch the beginning of a movie he's directing," she announced.

This was only the most beautiful guy ever to walk the halls of Greenhills School. He'd graduated two years before us and was studying filmmaking at New York University.

"He's home for break?" I asked, stunned. "Shouldn't he be in, like, Cannes or something?"

"He's here. I ran into him at 7-Eleven. I can't believe he remembered me."

I pictured a split-screen image of where we'd each be at midnight. "Is it going to be just you two?"

"I think so. We got into this really intense conversation about documentary filmmaking, and he said he'd love to show me his work. Can you believe? Come over now and help me choose what to wear!"

Yeah, I thought, I'm seeing a tiara, sequins, maybe a mink stole. Go ahead and borrow mine.

I looked down at my sweatpants and flannel shirt. The prospect of making a dent in Tristanne's bed while watching her layer on lip gloss

seemed pretty grim. "I'm sorry, but I promised my mom I'd help her clean up before her dinner party tonight."

No, I wasn't going to let thoughts of our hometown Quentin Tarantino and his adoring sidekick ruin my time at Ron's. Hey, the place was rocking. But then, as we grooved to the live-via-satellite broadcast of Don Henley in Times Square, Ron noticed that Tristanne hadn't come.

"She's at Dave Spiegel's," I said. The room got all quiet. Suddenly everybody was listening to me.

"How did that happen?" Ron asked.

"Apparently they ran into each other at 7-Eleven."

"And he asked her out?"

"Sure. She must have looked gorgeous by the light of the Slurpee machine." Egged on by the snickering, I kept going. "You know Tristanne and her pretentious art-appreciation shtick. Thank God it finally worked—maybe tonight she'll get the first kiss she's been gunning for since sixth grade."

As the yolk dripped off my face, I realized what I'd done: I'd announced Tristanne's most guarded secret to our whole gang. Was that me? It seemed so. Janine, who five minutes before had been jamming with me to "Dancing Queen," was looking at me like I'd sprouted horns and a bright-red tail.

That entire night I felt bad. Bad that I was toasting the New Year with a can of Coke; bad about the kind of friend I was. You're supposed to want the best for people you love, and while I'd (kind of) hidden my bitterness in Janine's case, with Tristanne I was acting like a character from *Heathers*.<sup>2</sup>

After the party I drove alone over to Tristanne's house. A light was on in her room. Even though it was late, I knocked at the kitchen door, and she came downstairs to let me in. She was glowing. I heard the story from start to finish—how they ate three bags of microwave popcorn; how she didn't even notice when it was midnight, because Dave was talking about some camera he had used to shoot his movie; how they listened to three Elvis Costello CDs. Very John Hughes,<sup>3</sup> down to the goodnight kiss in the middle of the street.

And even though part of me cringed while I smiled—okay, most of me, between my jealousy and my fear that she'd find out about what I'd said at the party—I knew I was acting like the kind of friend I wanted to be.

Maybe that seems like faking it. It kind of is. But sometimes, at least where I come from, that's the best you can do. For all I know, there are people who always feel psyched when great stuff happens to their friends, but I haven't figured out how to be one of them. Honestly, I don't even feel that bad—it's part of me and it's not going to change any time soon.

Sometime after that awful night I realized that getting jealous isn't immature; what is is letting jealousy make you mean. You can't train yourself not to feel something, but you can train yourself to let it go before it turns you all snipey. So at times my congratulatory grin is a little strained—but it's there. And I know I'll be glad when I win the lottery and all my friends have to clap. ♪