

# THE SECRET

BY VICTORIA AVINA

The beaming rays of the sun emitted a feverish, radiant heat that stretched across campus, blinding the eyesight of many Indiana University students. Jackie, a sophomore, felt sweltered from the scorching rays and could not stop sweating. Her t-shirt, moist from sweat, clung loosely against her skin as she rested uncomfortably on a bench waiting for her friend to join her.

She could hear the conversation of the people far across from her, where Daniel Audwin stood. His shaggy, dirty, blonde hair glistened and brightened under the sun as he laughed along with a few other girls and other guys that looked as if they envied him.

“Daniel, I’ve missed you so much!” a girl said as she grabbed on to his arm and hugged him. “We should hang out soon!” Jackie felt annoyed watching this girl desperately try to get his attention. She watched all the girls by him do this. They swarmed around him like flies around fruit, enthralled by every word he spoke. Even worse, she felt no different from them in her longing to talk to him. She also admired his appearance, masculine persona, and sense of style. He wore a fitted, button-down green long sleeve shirt that wrapped perfectly around his muscular and lean body. Jackie’s eyes lingered a little longer before she turned away, afraid that he might notice.

“Why don’t you try talking to him? He’s really nice.” Alison stood in front of Jackie smiling as she tried to be supportive of her friend's crush. She sat down on the bench and reached into her backpack to grab her lunch.

“You still haven’t gotten the balls to actually have a conversation with him.” She took another bite of her sandwich. “I don’t understand what’s so hard about it. He’s even in your class. Just

go up and ask him what the homework was or something.”

Jackie tugged at her shirt while taking another sneak peek at Daniel.

“I will as soon as I stop feeling inferior.” She laughed as an attempt to make her insecure remark appear as a joke. She leaned back on the bench and felt a wave of helplessness overcome her.

“He’s so nice to everyone except for me,” she said.

“Not noticing you does not mean he’s being mean to you. Why don’t you try standing out and dressing up a little?”

“I know, and I can’t wake up early enough,” Jackie explained.

“I wake late, take a shower and put the easiest clothes to wear on.”

“Well, he thinks people should make an effort to look nice when they go out. You always wear sweat pants, sport bras, and t-shirts—that’s no effort at all”

“Yeah, okay,” Jackie responded. Allison walked back to her afternoon classes after she was done eating while Jackie sat at the bench a little longer and sulked at her diminutive chances of Daniel liking her back.

Tons of pocket-sized, white and grey rocks lay scattered underneath the bench. She moved them around with her feet, kicking or picking them up as she thought back to what Allison had suggested. Maybe, while she was downtown later today, she could at least browse the junior clothing section at Forever21 and H&M. She felt self-conscious and scared that girl clothes would not look nice on her and imagined a gorilla wearing a dress. “Yep, that’s how I would look”, she thought.

Jackie headed for the afternoon train. It was a long, dreadful half an hour ride, especially without having friends to talk to. She pictured herself wearing a skirt or jeans with a nice blouse while talking to Daniel to pass the time. It’s not like she would transform into a beautiful girl that he would notice overnight.

After getting off the train, she headed towards the end of the block while trying to remember where Starbucks was located so she could stock up on caffeine before she went to the mall. However, Jackie felt herself becoming lost as she roamed through the streets of downtown. She did not recognize her surrounding and started to walk back. As she was about to cross the street, she caught a glimpse of a familiar face; it was a woman, who looked like she was in her twenties. She wore a long, dark maxi dress that hung loose and lightly against her body with brown and black wedges. Her face was masked with red lipstick and thick eyeliner that formed a wing at the end.

Although not well-rounded when it came to makeup, Jackie could tell that the girl's face was contoured with more than a generous amount of bronzer, highlighter, and foundation. The lady wore a lot of makeup. Her facial features and persona were still recognizable. She knew she met this person before; she just couldn't pinpoint who it was. Until she realized that this person resembled Daniel, despite the makeup, the dress, and the long hair. Was it his sister? She couldn't recall if he had one.

Jackie felt an urgent need to know who it was at that moment. Without the woman knowing it, Jackie marched up right in front of the woman and then gasped. Close up, she looked like a he. She looked like Daniel wearing a dress and a wig with loads of makeup. Jackie froze. Daniel stood there in front of her in horror. He searched for words to tell Jackie, excuses to make up, but he could not think of anything. She knew his secret. For the first time, she saw a fearful and anxious expression on his face. She stared at him for a couple seconds longer before saying, "Sorry Miss, I thought you were someone else. Have a good day".