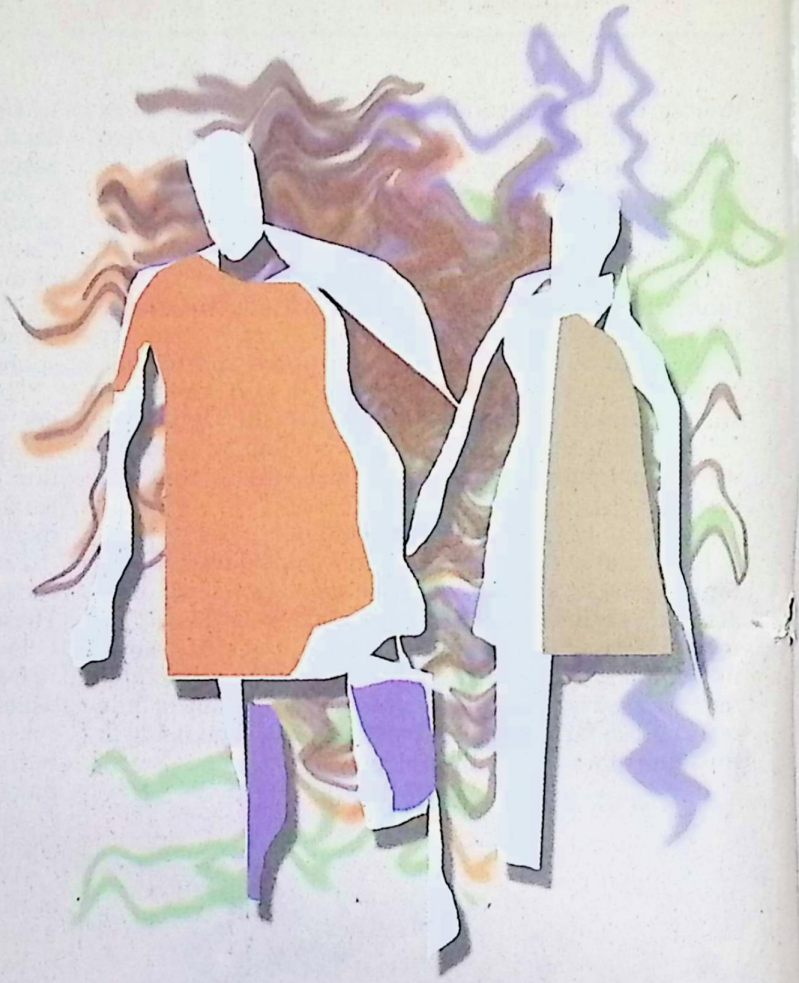


Every year our town hosts a talent show to raise money for charity. Fifteen minutes before curtain call, I quietly tiptoed backstage and making sure no one was looking sprinkled itching powder on Sarah's costume.

The plan:

1. She would start to itch while performing her song and scratch wildly at herself.
2. Everyone would laugh and point at her jumping around on the stage.
3. She would be humiliated and people would forget all about my pictures.

Things that went wrong with the plan:

1. She tripped while scratching herself.
2. Fell off the stage.
3. Sprained her ankle.

Payback is supposed to feel great but right now watching the paramedics taking Sarah to the hospital, the only emotion I'm feeling is guilt. Things are not going my way lately I locked myself out of the house, locked myself inside the house, caused several small fires in the kitchen, almost drowned in the bathtub and got bitten by a crazy bunny rabbit.

I finally broke down and told Mom everything and she said that I'm unconsciously sabotaging myself because of my guilty conscience. Yesterday I couldn't get out of bed because of cramps and Mom said they were sympathy pains. Weird, I didn't even know I cared that much. I'm an eternal optimist, always managing to find some good in every situation but right now things seem hopelessly depressing with no chance for improvement. For once I'm at a complete loss for what to do.

When in doubt, shop. Whoever said money can't buy happiness obviously either didn't know where to go shopping or didn't have the money to go shopping with.

And it was in the midst of trying on these gorgeous pair of heels that I had a sudden moment of clarity, a revelation. Sarah's a freaking annoying, joy-sucking bore with no sense of style and she can't change that. That's just who she is. But what I did to her was calculated malice. Mom's right. We are all sacred links in the eternal circle of life. We should learn to...

A high pitched squeal beside me broke into my thoughts. 'Oh my God,' a woman gasped. 'My water just broke! Excuse me... miss? Can you help me? I'm in labour! Miss?'

'Uh, hello! Do you mind?' I snapped. 'I'm trying to have a character defining moment here.' Hmph, how rude! Some people are just so self centred.

Ah, what a beautiful morning! Last night I came clean with Sarah, who much to my surprise and relief forgave me. Sarah realises now that she has some boundary issues and has agreed to stop pestering me all the time and give me my space. I was wrong - people can change.

Things are finally back to normal. I'm no longer at risk of self-induced death by guilty conscience, I'm once again an object of admiration and worship amongst my peers, Dad just returned from a hush-hush undercover spy mission in Russia and Mom's working on her latest book, 'Itching: The True Test Of Friendship'.

I skipped down the stairs and whistling happily to myself entered the kitchen. 'Hello, family! Isn't it a lovely... what the...?' I stopped in mid sentence and stared open mouthed. Sarah, wobbling around on her crutches was serving my family breakfast.

She beamed when she saw me and started chattering, 'There you are! Come, sit. I just made pancakes. Listen, I was thinking we should go to the book fair today. Pick me up at four. We'll get some pizza later on. By the way I'll have to stay over tonight, they're re-painting the walls in my room. I told them to do it in pink. It'll look really cool, don't you think? Oh, we'll have so much fun tonight! I just put in a new roll of film... let's take one now. S-m-i-l-e!'

(Momentarily blinded by flashbulb)

Sigh. I'll go get the gun.

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