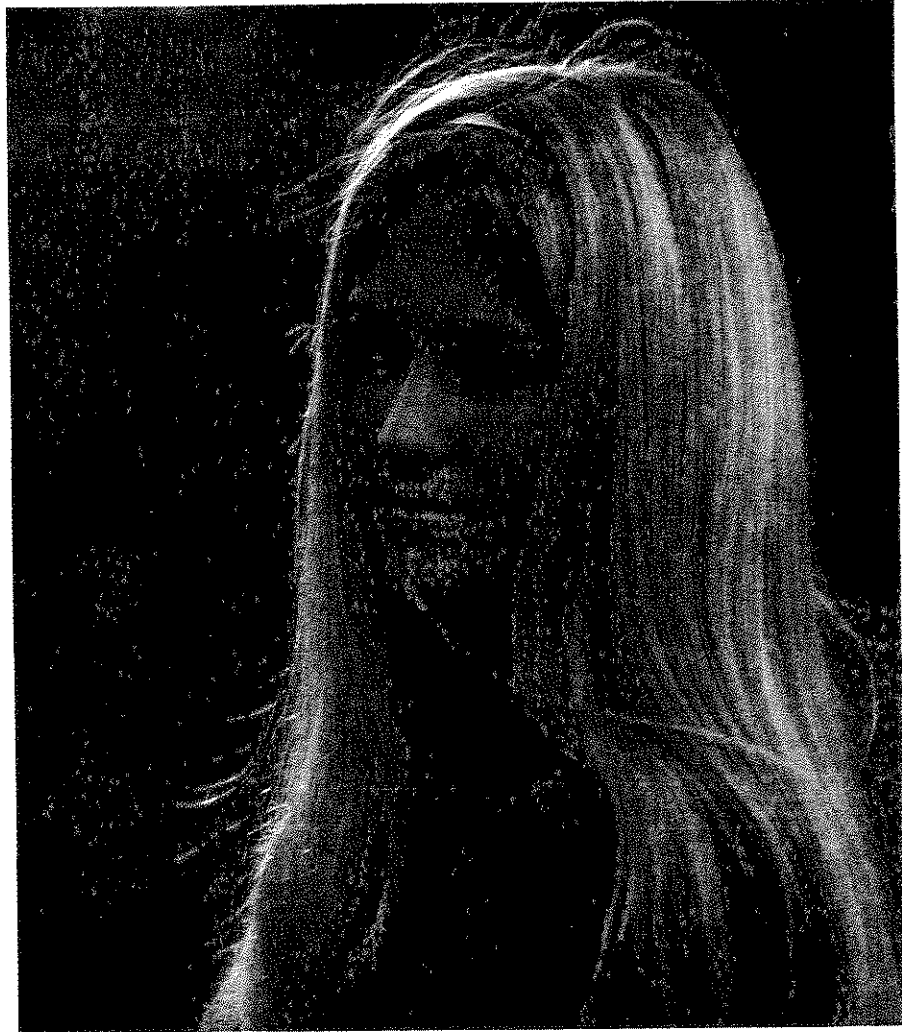


Golden Girl

GILLIAN CHAN



Focus Your Learning

Reading this story will help you:

- express your opinion
- explore the use of first person narration
- analyse character

I worked hard to be Anna Murphy's best friend. Don't get me wrong—it was worth it. Without Anna I'd have been nobody. But Anna never has to work hard. She's probably the best-looking girl in town and, what's worse, it's all natural. Even as a little kid she had everyone drooling about how cute she was, with her long blond curls and big brown eyes. Now everyone's telling her she should be a model. They make me want to throw up. She has this fake, modest smile and a "What, me? I'm not pretty enough" routine, and then just eats it up when they all rush to contradict her.

Her dad's loaded, and nothing's too good for "Princess." Boys fight over her—like, actually fight. I used to hope that some of whatever she has

would rub off on me. I mean, I deserved some pay-off for all the crap she dished out.

The latest load started the day we went into English class and Miss Grainger had this guy with her. He was drop-dead gorgeous, like one of the hunks we drool over in those magazines we don't admit reading because they're not cool. He was about six foot two with these amazing shoulders. At first I couldn't see his face because he was bent over, reading some list on Miss Grainger's desk. Then, wow! Green eyes with long, thick lashes. Tanned skin without a zit in sight. He even had a slightly crooked nose that saved him from being a total pretty boy.

Anna gasped. "Donna, who is he?"

Like I'm supposed to know?

"Aha! Even Grainger's making eyes at him, the dirty old lady." Anna's had it in for Miss Grainger since last year. Grainger just hadn't heard the news that Anna was Miss Perfect and had told her it was a shame that she did just enough work to get a decent grade when if she worked hard she could be brilliant at English. That's a real no-no, criticizing Anna. After all, her entire life the rest of the world's been telling her how wonderful she is.

"Come on, settle down. We've got a lot to do today." Grainger gave some latecomers the death stare as they stumbled in, banging against chairs. "This is Mr. McCallum from the university. He's going to be with us for the next two months. At first he'll be sitting in on some classes, and later he'll be teaching."

Anna, always the drama queen, buried her face in her arms. "Oh no, he's a student teacher. Let's hope he's a keeper, I'd *really* like to get to know him." This last bit came out in the breathy voice Anna uses when she's trying to sound sexy but sounds like she's having an asthma attack. "I hope that creep Lowther doesn't screw things up again."

Anna has this seriously selective memory. OK, Bob Lowther did start the trouble with the last student teacher. She was so stupid. She told us to express ourselves any way we liked. So he did. For Bob, jumping from desk to desk hooting like a chimp expressed exactly how he felt about her dorky ideas, and the rest of us weren't far behind. Anna and I sat on our desks screeching as loudly as we could. A bunch of kids at the back lit up cigarettes. Even Dennis Mason was winging paper planes around. You should have seen his face when one of them hit the student teacher smack between the eyes, and she started to cry. He rushed up to her, apologizing like crazy. Anna was laughing hysterically. And she even gave Elly Kovacs a hard time for about a week afterward for helping Dennis get the stupid cow out of the room. Here Anna was blaming Bob for the whole thing, right? Like she was a total angel.

Miss Grainger showed Mr. McCallum to a chair and turned her attention back to us. "Get out your copies of *Julius Caesar* and let's make a start."



Anna was trying to check out the student teacher without being too obvious, so she had made no move to get out her book. I nudged her in the ribs.

"All right, all right!" she whispered, hardly taking her eyes off him as she fumbled in her backpack.

I thought she'd have to concentrate then because Grainger asked her to read Portia. I have to admit it—Anna's pretty good. She's been in just about every school play since kindergarten. When she was a little kid she used to go on about how she was going to be a movie star, but she dropped the idea when Mrs. Snow, our drama teacher, told her how hard it was to break into acting. Now she says she wants to be a news anchor. I can see her doing it, too. Daddy will pay for her to go to some fancy media-studies college. And then she'll waltz up to a television station and expect them to fall all over themselves to give her a job. The sickening thing is that they probably will, because she's good-looking and, no matter how she tries to hide it, pretty smart, too. Me, I'll be lucky to manage a year at the local community college, if I can scrape together the tuition, doing whatever subject is most likely to get me a job, any dead-end job.

"Anna, just what is so fascinating at the back of the room?" Grainger couldn't resist a small smirk when that got a giggle from the class. I pressed my lips together to keep from laughing and put on my best sympathetic face.

Anna just blushed and muttered.

She didn't turn around again after that, but she didn't follow the play either. She had a piece of paper half hidden under her book, and she was doing a pretty passable sketch of McCallum.

"Well, Anna? We're waiting."

Everyone silently turned to look. Anna stared down Miss Grainger with this sneer on her face as if she'd been interrupted at something seriously important.

"It's your line, Anna." Miss Grainger was sounding real snippy. "When you follow the text, it makes it run so much more smoothly for those who *are* listening."

I thought Anna got off easy, but she flounced around in her seat and flicked the pages. She glared at me, and I wasn't much help. I knew the general area, but I'd been too busy watching her to know exactly what speech was next.

"Someone show them where we are, for heaven's sake." Grainger was doing this eyes-rolling-upwards thing she does to show how stupid she thinks you are. It ticked me off that I was being included—I'd been paying more attention than Anna. But that's just typical. Dennis turned around, showing us the page and pointing to Portia's speech.

Anna started reading then. Her face was bright red, and for the first few words her voice was shaky, but she got it together. It was this scene where Portia confronts her husband, Brutus, and Anna had us all believing how angry and hurt old Portia was, even with the geek reading Brutus sounding like a talking log. At the end of the scene, she glared at Miss Grainger.

"There, Anna. See what you can do when you concentrate?"

I thought that was pretty neat, but Anna gave her the hate stare for the rest of the period.

When it was over and Miss Grainger shepherded the student teacher out, Anna packed up her books and turned on me. "What's the matter with you, Donna? You made me look like an idiot back there."

I couldn't believe it. What had I done?

"He'll think I'm a real bimbo, being told off for turning around and then not following the text."

This was my fault?

"You could have just kept track of where we were meant to be." Anna was really getting into it now. "He'll think we're just a couple of airheads."

The self-important, spoiled little creep, pouting because some guy she didn't even know might think she's a ditz. Oh well, all she wanted was someone to lash out at, and guess who was there—good old Donna. I bit back what I really wanted to say, thought it'd be better to suck up to her. That's why she keeps me around, after all. "Come on, Anna, he's got to think you're quite something after the way you read."

That stopped her. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you read Portia like you really felt all those things, so you can't be stupid, right? You must understand the play." I went in for the killer punch. "And I saw him looking at you while you were reading, like he was impressed." I hadn't, of course, but I knew she'd buy it, she's so vain.

"Really?"

"Yeah, really, Anna."

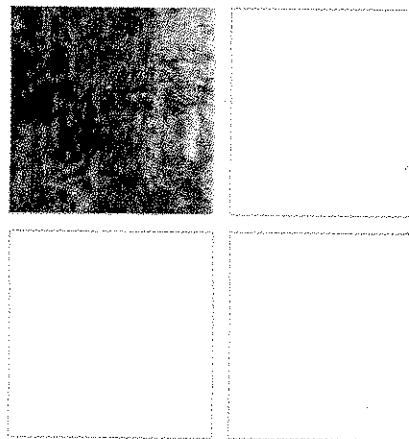
"Come on, let's get some lunch." Anna sauntered out of the room with a huge smile on her face.

This McCallum guy was all Anna talked about for the rest of the day. You'd think he could walk on water, the way she went on. On the way home with some of the others, she was even worse.

"Wow! Is he good-looking—but mature, too."

"Anna, he's probably only five years older than we are," said Michael. "The same age as your brother Liam—and you're always saying what a jerk he is."

Michael was Anna's boyfriend, Mr. Wonderful to her Miss Perfect. They were The Couple, if you get what I'm saying. I suppose it's kind of predictable—captain of the football team and the head cheerleader. I'd kill to



get a guy like Michael. But Anna just acted like he was her due or something, and treated him like dirt. All the time, too, not just now going on about how gorgeous the student teacher was, like Michael had no feelings.

I go out with one of Michael's friends on the team, Doug Washburn. He's all right, but that's all. He's OK looking but nothing compared to Michael—Doug looks like those movie actors who play the hero's buddy and never get the girl. I know he has the hots for Anna—what boy doesn't—but he hasn't the nerve to ask her out, so he makes do with me. If I hadn't been Anna's friend I doubt he'd even have bothered. I don't really like him that much but, hey, at least he's on the team.

Anna just stared at Michael like he was stupid. "He's nothing like Liam. You can tell this guy's been around—he's sophisticated."

"Oh, come off it, Anna. You've never even spoken to him, you've seen him once and suddenly you know everything about him." Michael wasn't picking up the danger signals—the way Anna's face was flushing, how her lips were tightening.

"His suit was one of those fancy designer ones—Boss or maybe even Armani," I tossed in to back Anna up, maybe earn back some brownie points.

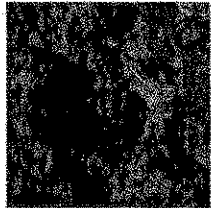
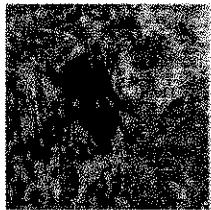
"So what!" Michael was getting steamed himself now. "Anna, that guy doesn't even know you exist. And even if he does, he's not going to be interested in a schoolgirl."

Anna stopped dead and turned to face Michael. "That's what you think." Giving everyone her biggest, brightest smile, she said, "You just wait and see." Her chin was up, daring Michael to challenge her. What had I started here?

Michael hitched up his backpack. "I'll see you tomorrow. Maybe you'll be in a better mood. Bye, guys." Off he went, not looking back even once.

I'd have been devastated, run after him even, but all Anna did was smile. "I'll show *him*." Looking around, she said, "You'll all see." She linked her arm through mine. "Let's go, Donna. Come over to my house and we'll do our homework." That was a laugh. Anna just wanted me there so she could go on about McCallum. I'd end up doing my homework really late, after I'd watched my kid sisters till my mother got back from work.

By the time Mr. McCallum started full-time at the school, instead of just coming on observation visits, he had a real following, with the girls drooling over him and the boys thinking he was an OK guy because he was a jock and helped out with the sports programs. Anna kept dropping hints that she was going to make a play for him, and she had most people believing she could pull it off. Michael never said anything, just got this closed look on his face. Maybe, if he got really ticked off with her, I could make a move on him.



McCallum's first lesson was OK. At least he tried to make things interesting. Even Bob didn't mess him around. You could tell McCallum was nervous because he was already at the front of the room when we piled in, pacing up and down by the board where he'd written "Living Language." When we actually sat down and showed signs that we'd listen, he relaxed a bit. Anna had bagged some seats right at the front and stared at him like a kid looking at an ice-cream cake.

This "Living Language" crap was all about how language changes. He started off by getting us to work in pairs, writing down as many slang words as we could think of. Bob could really have taken advantage but he didn't, and he had all this great street slang from when he used to live in Toronto. McCallum got all excited, making some crack about how we had a real expert in our midst. Bob almost forgot that he was the school bad boy, and grinned. I could tell that Anna was getting mad, but she had nothing to out-class Bob, so she had to make do with tossing her hair and leaning back. The guys in the front row had a fine time, but McCallum didn't seem to notice. Anyway, by the end of the period she was getting pretty desperate.

It was the homework he set us that gave her a chance to get noticed. He wanted us to talk to someone older, like our parents, and collect a list of the slang they used when they were our age. The idea was that we could see how words had changed, and maybe how some words had different meanings now.

We packed up and I waited like normal for Anna, but she made this sign with her hand that I was to go. I mean, who did she think she was, dismissing me like I'm her slave or something. Michael was starting up the aisle toward her, but I met him on my way out.

"Anna doesn't want us to wait." Well, how else could I say it? He looked as if he might protest, so I grabbed his arm and steered him out of the room.

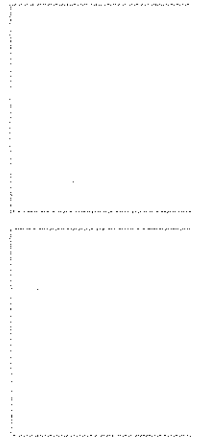
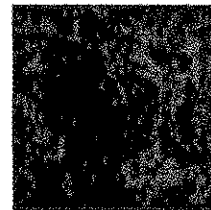
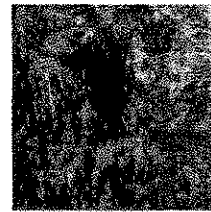
"What's with her?" Even with the noise in the corridor I could hear how mad he was.

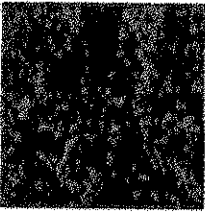
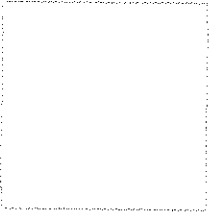
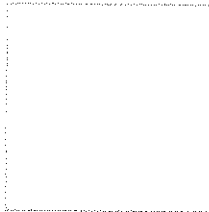
Looking really sympathetic, I said, "Don't worry, Michael. She's talked so much about McCallum that she's got to make him notice her or everyone will laugh at her. Once she's done that, she'll let it drop—you'll see." I was lying through my teeth, of course. I knew how serious Anna was—she'd told me often enough over the past few weeks—but Michael swallowed it.

"Tell Anna I'll be out on the field kicking a football around, OK?"

I was straining to hear what was going on in the room, so I kind of brushed him off. "Yeah, yeah, I'll do that." Once he'd gone, I stood as close to the open door as I could without being seen. Anna was standing by the teacher's desk while McCallum packed up his stuff.

"Mr. McCallum, does it have to be a parent we ask?" Anna was giving





him the Smile full blast. It was almost funny to see her run through her tricks.

Without looking up, he replied, "Well, no, anyone older will do."

"See, I thought I'd ask my great-grandmother." Anna's voice carried real well, all eagerness and please-notice-me. "She's really old, but she's still all there. I visit her every week in the retirement home, and she tells really interesting stories about when she was a girl. She was a suffragette in England." This was a crock. Anna was always complaining about having to visit her, about how she had whiskers and slopped her food.

"That may be too far back, you know. The other kids might find it difficult to relate it to their own experience."

Anna didn't miss a beat. "Exactly. That's why I thought if I interviewed her daughter—my gran—and my own mother, then maybe I could sort of map their experiences, showing how circumstances affected the way they talked and all that." Got him! What teacher wouldn't be flattered by a kid wanting to do extra work for them after their very first lesson? "It would take a long time, but it could be really interesting."

Closing his briefcase, he looked at Anna for the first time. "You're ...?"

"Anna. Anna Murphy." She positively glowed.

"Well, Anna, if everyone's as enthusiastic as you are, the next month is going to be fun." He smiled in her general direction and swept out of the room.

I moved well away from the door so Anna wouldn't have any idea I'd seen and heard it all.

"Donna, you were right! He likes me. He was really keen on my idea about the homework and he made a point of asking my name." It all came out in a rush as Anna ran up to where I was lounging against some lockers. Notice the way she just expected me to be waiting, like I had nothing better to do. "This is going to be easier than I thought. You should have seen the way he looked at me." As we passed the glass trophy case, she stopped and checked out her reflection.

I *had* seen the way he looked at her. I didn't say anything—just stored it all away for future use.

Anna made sure she was always the last out of McCallum's class and usually found something to talk to him about. As her best friend, I waited outside in the corridor. It was pathetic, like being back in grade three when you think it's so neat to have a teacher notice you. She gushed away, and he always took time to talk about some assignment or her slang-in-the-family project. She'd actually done the whole thing, just like she said she would—it must have taken her hours. Anyway, pretty soon she'd get him talking about himself. Once she even spun him this line about how English was her favourite subject and how she wanted to be an English teacher. He

launched into this long rambling story about how he'd decided on English because he wanted to share his love of literature with kids. If you asked me, it was all a load of crap, but they both seemed to believe it.

I never let on that I listened, just made the right noises when Anna told me her latest triumph—how he looked at her, how he really wanted to ask her out but couldn't because he was a student teacher. It was kind of sad. He obviously liked her, but she was reading far too much into it.

The way Michael acted probably convinced most kids there was something going on. He was so jealous and possessive that if you wanted him to lose his temper all you had to do was say the word "McCallum." There was this dance coming up and Michael practically begged Anna, in front of a whole lot of people, to go with him, like there was a chance she might turn up with someone else. She agreed in this real condescending tone, and when Michael went off, she kind of hinted that he would just be the front to hide what was really going on.

See, the big news about the dance was that McCallum was going to be there. He'd told some guys on the football team that student teachers were encouraged to get involved in the school's extracurricular activities. So, he and the nerdy science type were going to help the regular teachers run the dance. Anna was in heaven.

"This is my big chance, Donna. I know he really likes me but I've got to show him I'm not a kid." She looked like my little sister Stacey does when she watches commercials for real fancy toys on television—she really wants them but is pretty sure she won't get any.

As Faithful Friend, I could dig around a bit, maybe get something I could use on her later. "He knows that already, doesn't he? I mean, the way you say he talks to you when you're alone. You said he just couldn't act on how he felt, that's all."

"Yeah, well, that's true, but I really want to show how different I am from those girls who have crushes on him." She was staring past me, focussed on the parking lot. McCallum was walking toward a red sports car. "You know why he was assigned to this school, Donna?"

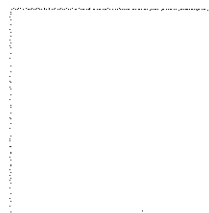
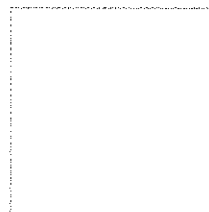
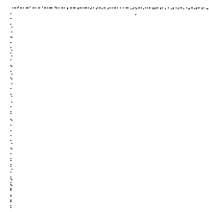
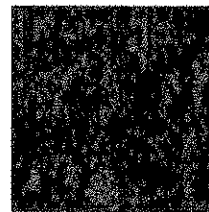
I didn't, but I knew she was going to tell me.

"He's Warren's nephew."

Typical, Anna calling old man Pelletier by his first name. Apart from Anna's dad, who owns the biggest construction company in Elmwood, Pelletier is about the richest man in town. He has this big poultry-packing factory and a whole load of farms outside town. All I knew about him was that I'd do just about anything not to end up working for him once I was out of school.

"Big deal!"

"My dad says he's staying with his uncle and during the summer he's



going to be working up at the processing plant." Anna's voice was quiet and dreamy. It didn't take much to work out what she was thinking. I tried digging a bit more but Anna just smiled real secretively and said, "I'm going to Lexington this Saturday to look for a dress. You want to come?"

Shopping with Anna is not easy, trying to keep smiling while she throws money around like there's no tomorrow and I search for whatever's cheapest but doesn't look too cheesy. "Nah, I've got one already." I changed the subject quick. "What are you looking for?" I didn't want to talk about my dress, a tacky hand-me-down from my cousin, the queen of bad taste.

"Just you wait and see." Anna smiled knowingly and headed off.

Anna wouldn't show me what she had bought until the actual night. Doug and I were going to the dance with her and Michael, so he came by to pick us both up. He didn't ring the doorbell, just honked from the driveway. That was weird, but I didn't say anything when I got into the back seat with Doug.

Anna turned around. "Hi, guys. All set?" She sounded as if she was trying to keep from laughing.

"Put your seat belt on, Anna." Michael's voice was tight. He was sitting up real straight, glaring out the windshield.

"All right, give me a break." Anna stayed twisted, facing us. "He's such a grouch tonight." A giggle escaped, choked off as Michael slammed the car into reverse and backed onto the street so Anna was thrown off balance before she turned and sat facing the front, her seat belt still hanging loose.

"Is your brother the DJ tonight, Anna?" Doug usually has the sensitivity of a bull moose, but I couldn't believe that even he hadn't noticed the tension.

"That's right—Liam's my man." I could have sworn she was still trying not to laugh. Liam was crazy and he'd do just about anything for Anna.

The school gym was already crowded by the time we got there. They'd tried to decorate it with clusters of balloons and paper streamers, but it still looked like a hole. Anna and I went to the cloakroom to take off our coats.

Get this—a deep crimson jersey number that clung to every line and curve of Anna's body. It had one of those necklines that was kind of off the shoulder, and I swear willpower alone was keeping it up.

"Anna!"

Anna spun around to give me the full effect. It was so tight that she couldn't have been wearing any underwear. "Michael doesn't like it." She sounded so smug that I felt real sorry for him.

"It's different." One of my all-time great understatements. She made the rest of us look like little girls in party dresses, all bows and velvet. "What did your parents say?"

"Dad hasn't seen it. He's out with the Rotarians. Mom was OK—just made some crack about borrowing it for the Lions Club dance."

My mother wouldn't have let me out of the house in something like that. "Do you think *he'll* like it?"

I shrugged. "Hey, what guy wouldn't?"

Walking back through the gym was quite something. Anna kind of glided through the crowd, acknowledging them with smiles and waves, like she was royalty or something. I don't think anyone even noticed me. So, what's new?

Michael and Doug had bagged one of the tables arranged around the walls of the gym. When he saw Anna, Doug went bright red and didn't seem able to speak, which made it real awkward since Michael was sitting there stone-faced and silent. Anna and I kept badmouthing everyone around us, why they shouldn't have worn what they did, how badly they'd done their hair—you know, the usual. We didn't really mean anything by it. Besides, Anna's mind was elsewhere. She kept looking around, trying to spot McCallum in the crowd.

"How about dancing?" Anna stood up and looked down at Michael.

He didn't move his eyes in her direction, just shook his head.

Doug found his tongue. "I'll dance with you, Anna."

He didn't even look at me, let alone ask if I minded, and he stepped on my foot stumbling out toward the floor with her. That really showed how I rated.

Michael was white faced. "You said she'd drop it." He almost spat each word. "She's making a fool of me."

How come I always get it in the neck from everyone? Like it was my fault the way Anna was behaving? "Look, Michael, I was wrong, OK? I think Anna's being a jerk, but I can't do anything about it." I leaned forward and put my hand on his. "I think she's treating you real bad." I waited till he looked at me. "But it's herself she's making look like a fool, not you. People will see through her." I wanted to add it was about time they did but, hey, maybe this wasn't the perfect moment.

He almost smiled. "Thanks, Donna. I really appre—"

"Hey, guys, you should see McCallum. Does he ever look cool." Good old Doug with his usual wonderful timing.

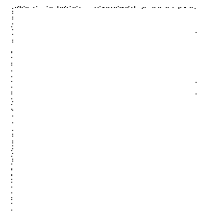
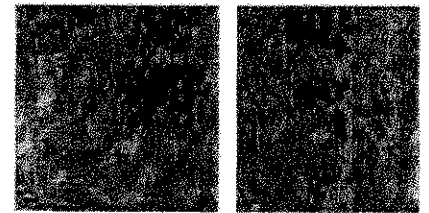
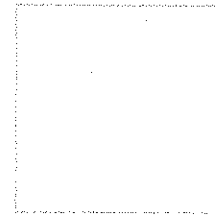
Michael gripped Doug's arm. "Where's Anna?"

"Calm down, she's gone over to talk to McCallum, that's all."

Michael turned. "Do you want to dance, Donna?"

"Sure." I ignored Doug's whining about being left by himself and followed Michael out onto the dance floor.

He headed for the centre of the floor and started dancing, but he was really





looking around for Anna. I don't think he'd have even noticed I was there, except that I pointed toward the stage. Anna was with a whole group of girls, clustered around McCallum. She grabbed his hand and started pulling him onto the floor. He glanced back at Miss Grainger, who just shrugged.

Liam was playing a fast number. Anna looked up at him and suddenly the CD stuck. With hardly a pause, Liam had his second player going. His voice came over the loudspeaker. "Sorry about that. But never fear, Liam's here. Let's slow the tempo down a bit, get into a romantic mood." He reached for a switch and dimmed the lights.

In the gloom, Anna threw her arms around McCallum's neck and pressed up against him. His back was rigid and his hands on Anna's waist seemed less holding her than trying to push her away. Even in the dark, they were the centre of attention.

"That's it. I'm out of here." Michael stalked off the dance floor. I headed back to our table so I wouldn't look like a total dork standing there by myself.

"Where's Michael?" Doug asked, a face on him like a spoiled kid.

"Look, I only danced with him because he was upset about Anna." Doug was just dumb enough to believe me. "He saw her dancing with McCallum and took off."

"I'll go look for him," Doug said.

The lights came back up. Anna still had hold of McCallum's hand and he looked real uncomfortable. The dance floor was clearing, and I heard a couple of sniggers as McCallum finally pulled his hand free, muttered something and headed back to Miss Grainger.

For a few seconds, Anna just stood there, looking like a baby whose rattle's been snatched away. Then she lit up a smile and kept it burning all the way back to our table.

"He's the smoothest dancer. Did you see us?" Anna didn't seem to notice Michael and Doug weren't there, just watched closely for my reaction to her next statement. "It's real hard for Iain. He has to play things so carefully till his teaching practice is over. That's why he couldn't dance with me again."

Iain! Right. Like I didn't know she'd made a point of finding out McCallum's first name from her father. "Yeah, you looked great together." I was more interested in McCallum with Miss Grainger, talking real seriously and looking in our direction.

Finally, it dawned on Anna that I was alone at the table. "He left," I said. "Doug's gone to look for him."

Anna sighed. "He's so immature at times! I mean how are we going to get home?" She sat down, turning toward the dance floor.

Miss Grainger was standing there alone.

Doug never caught up with Michael. He came rushing back, panting.

"His car's gone from the parking lot!" He shifted from one foot to the other, like he was waiting for a reward or something.

"He can be such an idiot." Anna was smiling as she said that. It gave her a real buzz to know that she had them lining up for her favours. "Never mind, we'll get a ride with someone else, I'm sure." She was looking around the room, scanning the faces. With a sigh she sat down at the table, picked up her drink, and then turned to Doug. "Since everyone seems to have deserted me, how about another dance?"

And that's how I got to spend the rest of the evening, watching Anna make out that she was having a great time. McCallum was nowhere to be seen.

I had to baby-sit the next day. My mom had actually been offered some overtime, which was too rare to refuse. Anna called at nine o'clock.

"Hey, Donna. Do you want to come over?"

"You know I can't leave the brats by themselves."

"But I really need to talk to you." There was a pause. "Can't Stacey watch the little guys? Your mom doesn't have to find out."

"Are you kidding? Stacey would rat on me in a minute. And Mom would murder me if she found out I left Stacey in charge." It would never occur to Anna that she could come over, maybe help me. I have to jump at her command. I think she's been to my place maybe twice, acting like she's doing me some huge favour.

"I wanted to talk about Iain."

I sat down cross-legged on the hall floor, figuring I was going to be listening for a long time. It was weird. I didn't have to say anything, not even make those encouraging "uh-huh" or "mm" noises.

"Oh, Donna, he's got such a great body, all hard and muscular. He smelled good, too, not sweaty. I just know he wanted to say something to me, but everyone was looking at us. He has to be so careful."

What a load of crap.

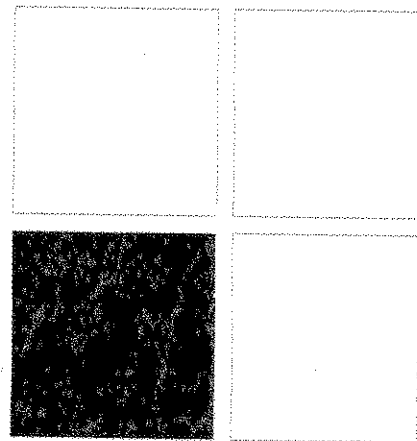
"Did you see? He didn't dance with anyone else—just me."

I had to face it—she wasn't just doing a number on Michael and the others, she was doing one on herself. Maybe that's what happens when you always get everything you want.

"Monday, I just know he's going to say something." Oh, really? "It's his last week at the school, so he'll be able to take more chances."

Right. I was going to enjoy watching Miss Snot find out how it feels to be disappointed, just like the rest of us. Meanwhile, I'd put up with Anna's hourly calls, saying the same things over and over. And you know what—she never mentioned Michael once.

On Monday, Anna came to school wearing black jeans and boots and a white shirt with a black suede vest over it that cost a fortune. She must have



been up real early that morning, because her hair tumbled around her face in that casual way you know takes hours to get right. She was so wired that it was lucky English is always in the morning. I don't think I could have stood much more of did she look OK and what did I think he'd say.

When we got to class Miss Grainger was there, sitting at the back with a notepad. With Anna beside me, it was hard to concentrate. She wasn't really sitting, she was posing. If McCallum asked a question, she just about killed herself to be the one to answer, but he never called on her—not once.

When the period was over, Anna went into her usual routine of packing her things slowly. She was so intent on McCallum that she didn't notice Miss Grainger coming up behind her.

"Was there something you wanted, Anna?" Miss Grainger had to move back to avoid getting stepped on when Anna jumped in surprise.

"Er, I wasn't quite clear about the assignment, that's all." Anna was stuttering. "I, uh, just wanted Mr. McCallum to go over it with me."

Putting her hand in the small of Anna's back, Miss Grainger guided her toward the door. "Ask one of the others, I'm sure they'll have written it down. Look, Donna's over there. Ask her."

Anna's face was brick red.

Miss Grainger came out a few seconds later with McCallum.

As they passed us, Anna turned away, pretending to be looking for something in her backpack. "What's she doing here?" she asked once they'd disappeared down the corridor.

It was pretty obvious to me, but I wanted to see how Anna would explain it away.

"I suppose she has to assess how he's doing, maybe write a report or something." The colour was going from her face now. "Yeah, that's it." She smiled and walked off, the bounce back in her step. "I'll just have to wait, that's all."

The wait was longer than Anna expected. Miss Grainger turned up at every one of McCallum's lessons that week. She even gave up pretending to make notes. I bet most everyone had worked out why she was there. Funny, though. No one said anything to Anna. If it had been me, jokes would have been all over school by now.

Michael hadn't spoken to Anna since the dance, but he and I had talked a few times. He kept saying he hated to see her make a fool of herself. He'd even called me at home once to talk about her. I could get him talking about something else for a bit, make him laugh, but he kept coming back to Anna.

By Thursday, Anna was getting desperate. She couldn't get past Miss Grainger in class, and in the halls McCallum either had people around him or he hurried away from her. She kept telling me he was just being ultra-

cautious. Come on! But I could see that she was getting edgy. Maybe this was the time to give Miss Teen Queen a little push, show everybody what an idiot she could be. So I suggested she write him a note.

I was with her when she wrote it, but she wouldn't listen to any of my suggestions. She kept going on about how it had to have the right tone, mature but not pushy, and it took her about a hundred tries to get it right.

Dear Iain,

I know that it has been difficult to balance your role as a student teacher with the friendship that has developed between us. I also realize that you had to treat me like just another pupil. Now that your practice teaching is ending, we can meet as equals. I shall be waiting at The Coffee House on Main Street at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday. No reply is necessary, as I know it might be difficult in the school situation.

Love,
Anna

She got me to leave it on his desk. He plunked his books right down on top of it, so he didn't see it until after all the goodbyes, when he started putting things in his briefcase. For once, Anna didn't hang around, so she didn't see him read the note, make a face, and then crumple it up and throw it in the garbage.

Miss Grainger looked at him. "Anything wrong?"

He shook his head and started out of the room. "Nothing important."

After they left, I got the note from the garbage, smoothed it out and put it carefully in my bag. At least Anna hadn't dotted all the *i*'s with little hearts, but "the friendship that has developed between us"—who was she kidding?

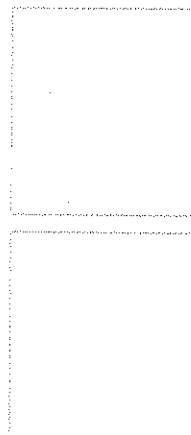
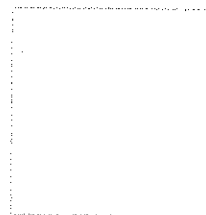
Michael was sitting out on the grass beneath this big oak tree behind the gym. Normally, he's part of a crowd, but he was by himself, his back against the tree, long legs stretched out in front. He was twisting a piece of grass between his fingers.

"Hey, Donna. How's things?" He hardly even glanced up.

I sat down next to him, where he couldn't avoid looking at me. "You're not going to believe what she's done now." I tried to get just the right tone—concern for him, but slightly ticked off at her. I held out the note and, after a while, he took it. I allowed myself a smile then, just a little one.

"I mean, just who does she think she is?"

Michael didn't say anything, just folded the note up carefully and put it in the back pocket of his jeans.



"We could pass it around, and then a whole bunch of us can turn up at The Coffee House. It would be so funny." I could just see it—Michael and me together—and the amazed look on Anna's face. Me giving his hand a reassuring squeeze every now and then.

When Michael finally spoke his voice was low. "Donna, you're supposed to be Anna's friend. And here you want to set her up, humiliate her. She's been a jerk the last month, for sure. But why do this? You really are vicious!"

I couldn't believe it. He was going to take all this crap from her, pretend this never happened, and go on playing Ken to her Barbie! He just didn't get it. "Michael! The point is, you all accept whatever she does. She snaps her fingers and everyone jumps. She's making you look a jerk!"

I thought that would get him, but he just shook his head. "I know that. But she couldn't help herself. Everyone's entitled to make mistakes. At least Anna never means to harm anyone."

I got up and walked away. This wasn't how it was meant to turn out.

I went down to The Coffee House. I watched her for an hour, sipping the coffee I know she hates and trying not to cry. I never told anyone, though. There was no point. After all, gold just keeps on shining. It's only us cheap imitations that tarnish and get junked. ■

Activities

1. At the end of the story, the narrator refers to "us cheap imitations." Read the story again. List all of the evidence, either in her actions or her words, that shows the narrator regards herself as a "cheap imitation" of Anna.
2.
 - a) The story is written in the first person. What effect does this perspective have on the story? Is the narrator likely to give reliable information? Justify your answer in a short paragraph.
 - b) Retell the story from the point of view of Michael, Mr. McCallum, or Anna herself. Present your tale as a monologue to the class. Afterwards, take questions from the audience.
3. The narrator says she "worked hard" to be Anna's best friend. Imagine that you are the narrator, applying for the job of "Best Friend." Research some different ways to organize résumés, and create a convincing application for the position.
4. Present the information in the story as a talk show. Interview the various characters in the novel. Invite members of the audience to ask the characters questions about their feelings and motives. The host should ask questions of each guest in turn, and the guests can also interact.