

little
SISTER

AIMEE SAID



WALKER BOOKS

AND SUBSIDIARIES

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Monday morning: Whitlam High School assembly hall. Welcome to another week of ~~mind-numbing boredom~~ higher education.

Year Ten filed to our designated rows of plastic chairs, watched over by Ms Brand, deputy principal and Official School Funbuster. Maz made me squeeze past Chloe Rider and her Country Road crew (their collars temporarily turned down to avoid being busted for breaking uniform rules) to get to the two empty seats next to Nicko and Simon. Thankfully, Simon was too engrossed in the dragons-and-knights-and-swords novel he was reading to notice me.

Our principal, Mr Masch, jogged up the three stairs to the stage. He was wearing a Whitlam High hoodie – his latest attempt to get down with the kidz. It was pretty lame, but you had to give him points for trying. After giving us the usual reminders about the ban on wireless internet dongles on school grounds and using the colour-coded

recycling bins properly, he clutched his hands together and rocked on his heels. One thing Mr Masch is not good at is playing the bad guy.

“I’m afraid it’s my not-very-happy duty to talk to you this morning about cyber safety,” he said sadly, emphasising the word “cyber” as if it was some great and mysterious being.

There was a collective groan from the hall. We’d already covered online stranger danger in Computer Science, Health and Development, and any other subject they thought they could sneak it into; the Learning and Leadership Centre walls were plastered with “Do you know who you’re really talking to?” posters, designed to make us think that every instant message we received was from some old pervert who was trying to lure us to a gruesome demise. And thanks to the school board’s parent education campaign, most of us got all this guff again at home.

“Bit of shush, please,” said Mr Masch. “I know you think you’ve heard this before, but there have been some incidents lately that suggest the time is ripe for a reminder.”

Maz, Simon, Nicko and I all turned to Prad, who had form for posting photos of himself (well, parts of himself) under a pseudonym. His barely concealed smirk confirmed that the King of the Moon had been at it again.

Mr Masch continued his bumbling. “Now, uh, we

all know how handy our mobile phones are – outside of school hours – and we like being able to catch up on friends’ news and, uh, photos in the virtual world. But we need to remember that not everyone accessing at our information is who we intended to see it, and that we might be giving away a lot more, uh, details about ourselves than we meant to ... or realise we have.”

There were murmurs around the hall along the lines of “What’s he on about?”

Ms Brand (aka Brandy, on account of the fact that she snaps at the slightest misdemeanour) leaped onto the stage as fast as her sturdy, sensible shoes would allow and grabbed the microphone. “What Mr Masch means is, make sure you don’t send information over your phone, or put anything on the internet, that you wouldn’t want everyone – including your parents and teachers – to see. Do I make myself clear?”

Mr Masch took back the microphone with a forced smile. “Thank you, Ms Brand. Straight to the point, as usual. Now, onto more pleasant things. Please welcome your school president, Larissa Miller, to give the weekly round-up of student news.”

There was clapping, whooping and “Go Lazza” catcalls as our glorious leader made her way to the stage. I slumped as low as I could in my orange plastic seat and made a gagging noise under my breath, echoed by Maz in a show of best-friend loyalty. Unfortunately, Brandy

heard us. Her monobrow furrowed in a familiar I'll-deal-with-you-later expression.

Larissa took her place on the podium and demonstrated why she was not only captain of Whitlam's debating team, but also the southern region's champion junior toastmaster. Every week we had to listen to her read the "student news" (aka What Whitlam's Overachievers Did Last Week), including the weekend sports results, debating team wins and choir medals. What was worse, half the announcements she made were about her own accomplishments.

A poster child for overachievers everywhere, Larissa Miller is brainy, sporty, civic-minded, environmentally aware – the complete package. And gorgeous. Not just pretty, but seriously beautiful, from the unsplit ends of her blond hair to her perfectly pedicured toenails. Even in Whitlam's navy blue, box-pleated school uniform – designed to turn even the most shapely female student into a waistless, bustless, sexless blob – she managed to look like she'd stepped out of the pages of *Vogue*.

While the rest of the hall hung on her every word, I wanted to scream with frustration that no one else could see through her perfecter-than-thou act to the self-centred, self-absorbed drama queen that lurked beneath the surface.

I should know: Larrie's my sister.