

Word count: about 1400

Dear Diary

Dear diary: I am absolutely fuming! Becks has gone TOO FAR. I know we share almost everything but there has got to be a line. After Circle Prayer I was up in the girls' room, looking through my section of the closet for my favorite top (Isaiah is visiting the Afternoon Girls' Meeting—eek!) and Sar was like, "If you're looking for your lavender top, Becks borrowed it for her private meeting with Isaiah." NOT OK!! I tried to act like I didn't care but Sar can always tell how I'm feeling—she's such an empath. She put her arms around me and reminded me that Isaiah says love of material things is the first step towards a life without God. I want to be close to God more than anything. But Becks gets so full of herself. Just last week I pointed out that Isaiah's been giving her special attention lately, and she got all coy and said, "I don't know what you're talking about, Nay. Isaiah loves all of us equally." But she looked so smug when she said it, twirling the end of her braid with her fingers and smiling. She knows Isaiah's singled her out (for some weird reason), and the truth is she absolutely EATS. IT. UP. Sometimes I want to scream, "Rebecca just loves herself! Look at me Isaiah! I would do anything to be close to God and you!" Ugh. Her hair is as black and shiny as a horse. And her lashes are so good it's stupid. OMG I hear someone coming—maybe it's Becks. More later.

Dear diary: When Becks finally came back into the girls' room I told her we needed to talk. She just looked straight ahead like there was something in front of her. (There wasn't.) I said, "Did you hear me? You're wearing my top." She was like, "What? Oh, sorry Nay." And she started to pull the shirt up but then stopped, and she went to her cot and took it off underneath the covers and then turned away. She is being so weird! What did Isaiah say to her? Her braid was all ruffled, too. Why? Isaiah's rooms are over the old barn, and the stairs have a missing board. Maybe she fell on her way down? If Isaiah saw her fall I don't blame her for not telling us—I would die of embarrassment!! I'm always worried that Isaiah will catch me with food on my face or my dress tucked into my tights. He says women should maintain a tidy exterior at all times. I try so hard to keep up my appearance. I brush my hair about a thousand times a day! But mine is so thin, it just flies everywhere no matter what I do. It'll never look like Becks' hair. Hers always looks tidy, and at the same time it's so shiny it just demands attention.

Dear diary: OMG!!! Last night after supper, we got to hang out with the adults in the common room. A couple of the men played guitar and the women sang. Isaiah was on the tattered gold sofa by the windows, the one the men pulled from the dump last month. There's a tall ficus right behind the sofa, and Isaiah's face was right in front of all those big green leaves, and I swear it was like nature's halo! He looked so peaceful and soft, with his eyes closed and his brown hair curling under his beard, like an animal that's full of power but gentle. Me and Sar sat on the floor by the coffee table, holding hands and listening to the music. (Becks didn't come down for supper, which is usually forbidden, but no one said anything. So weird!) With everyone together and the music playing, the room was so full of goodness. I thought, "I am as close to heaven as I will ever have on earth." I'm so glad and grateful to be in this community, with Isaiah watching over us. Girls on the outside are missing out, even though they get to go to the

mall and watch TV and chew gum, and sometimes I wish I could do those things. But those thoughts are wickedness. Every day, I'm getting closer to being as pure and good as possible.

Anyway: I'm sitting there, all warm and happy, with the sounds of the guitars vibrating low and the women's voices above, and I realize Isaiah is watching me. I cannot breathe!! I try to act like I don't notice he's looking, and then finally I absolutely cannot take it and I look over and he smiles!! So I smile back, and he smiles bigger, and his brown eyes get so soft and crinkly. I start to breathe again because oh god I love him so much. He beckons me toward him, which he has never done. Not ever. I go over, and the people on his left shuffle over so I can sit next to him. (Me! Next to Isaiah! Eek!) "Naomi," he says. "Are you enjoying the music?" And I tell him what I was thinking—that it's as close to heaven as there is on earth, and the room feels so full of God. And he's shining at me. Absolutely shining! I swear I can feel heat emanate from his body, and I know it's his beautiful spirit reaching out to touch me. "I'm so proud of you," he says. "So proud." And then he asks me to meet him the next day—which is today, right now!—to discuss my progress. I am buzzing!!! I have to go—I can't wait to tell you everything that happens!!

Dear diary:

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Dear diary: I'm sorry it's been so long since I've written. I guess I just haven't had that much to say in a while. This morning I was on the window seat in the girls' room, watching the trees waving in the breeze—a spring storm is coming, I can feel it—and suddenly Sar goes, "Nay what is with you? You're so quiet these days." I didn't know what to say. I hadn't even realized I'd been talking less. I just shrugged my shoulders and went back to watching the leaves. A few minutes passed and then Sar said, "Nay, wanna borrow that sweater you love? The white one with the drop shoulders?" I was so surprised. I've always loved that sweater. I should have felt

excited but I didn't. I felt disgusted. Which upset me, because why would a sweater disgust me? To make Sar happy I put it on. I noticed there was a loose thread at the cuff from the seam going up the forearm, and later, during Circle Prayer, I looked down and I had picked the whole seam apart up to my elbow. Sar never gets angry, but I hope she's not too disappointed when she sees it. Maybe I can sew it so she won't notice. I don't know why I did that.

I guess it's all part of growing up: being less chatty, caring less about clothes. That's probably a good thing! I don't know. I used to feel so excited to get older and become a woman. But sometimes I wish I could go back to being a child and stay that way forever. Isaiah says life is a journey up the mountain of the spirit, towards God; that we get closer to Him every day, until we see His face, so close we can touch it with our fingertips outstretched. There are days when I feel closer. But then there are other days where I feel very far from God. And far from myself too. Isaiah says the self is like your reflection in water. It seems real, but the moment you try and point to it—this is me, this is who I am—it disappears. I know that's true, but I do feel sort of disconnected. I feel like I'm the reflection. I'm the one that disappears. I don't know who's on shore.

Aaaahhh I don't know what I'm talking about. It's probably the weather. I hate this feeling before a storm, when the air gets thick and heavy. Here on the compound, everything smells sweet and rotten, and the wet air clings to your skin like the clammy hands of sick children. The trees wave like they're begging for help. And the cats yowl and run inside and hide under the furniture. And you know something terrible is coming.