

Friday, August 31

My room / 8:30 p.m.

Most people don't think it's possible to predict the future. I'm one of the exceptions.

I believe in signs — little clues that hint at things that might happen someday. You just have to be open to seeing them.

My BFF, Kara McAllister, doesn't think like I do. She's what you'd call a cynic. I mean, a sign can be *right in front* of her face, pointing her down the road to future events, but she'd rather figure out a way to explain why it *isn't* a sign at all than go ahead and believe that it *is* one.

Earlier tonight a VERY OBVIOUS sign landed right under my nose. Literally. I know that it means something FANTASTIC is going to happen to me this year! But did Kara interpret it the way I did? Well . . . I'm not exactly sure.

We'd gone to Triple Slice Pizza with Kara's boyfriend, Chip, to celebrate the last Friday before the start of the new school year. Kara and Chip sat on one side of the booth. I sat on the other. Alone.

So even though they PROMISED that I wasn't one, I pretty much felt like a third wheel before we even placed our order. You don't have to be a math genius (and trust me, I'm not) to figure out these two equations:

$$2 + 1 = \text{Third Wheel}$$

$$3 - 1 = \text{Date}$$

DUH!

That's one reason why I was more than happy to leave them by themselves when the cute guy at the window shouted: "Order up for McAllister!"

Actually, I had some other reasons for volunteering to get the pizza. (See above sentence. There was a CUTE GUY at the window!) More importantly, I wanted a chance to spy on Colleen McCarver, the *wickedest, sickest* girl at our school. (Just to be clear, I mean *wicked* and *sick* in a bad way . . . although now that I think about it, she's so popular that most people probably think she's wicked and sick in a cool way. Whatever!) Not that I cared what she was doing, because I totally didn't, but I did care about who she was with:



See, last year Alex dumped Maybelline for a *high school* cheerleader. (FYI: Kara and I call Colleen McCarver *Maybelline* because she wears so much makeup.) Anyway,

that breakup was the gossip of the millennium at Spring Valley Middle. I'm not even joking.

I didn't see how Maybelline could possibly take Alex back after he'd publicly humiliated her like that, even if he is superstar gorgeous. I know *I* wouldn't give him another chance. No way!

(Still . . . Alex B didn't break up with *me* for a cheerleader. So if he was suddenly available . . .)

I glanced their way as I walked by their booth. Alex B was concentrating on opening a pack of crackers. That was a good sign! (For me, not Maybelline.) I mean, it's kind of OVER when your crush is more interested in a pack of crackers than in you!

Crackers > Crush = Doomed Relationship

Our order was waiting a few steps away. I picked up the pizza and inhaled. I'm CRAZY for the smell of fresh pizza dough — or any kind of dough, really. Mom used to bake all the time before Dad left. Not just pizza, but breads, cakes, and cookies, too. I soooo miss that smell.

Flour + Butter + Mixer + Oven = Nose Paradise

That's the smell, when I think about it, of a happy home.

I looked over at Alex and Maybelline again as I walked back to our booth. No eye or body contact between them! ☺

When I reached our table with the extra-large triple-cheese pizza, Kara and Chip quickly slid apart. That wasn't AWKWARD for me or anything. Geez!

"I can't tell if they're back together or not," I reported, "but at least Maybelline doesn't look like a third wheel."

"You're NOT a third wheel," said Kara, who was holding hands with Chip under the table.

"Yes, I am," I said. "And it looks like I'm going to be one forever. I'll never find the right guy!" I believed it, too, because I have a boy problem. I've been super-unlucky in love. Look at the two guys I dated last year.

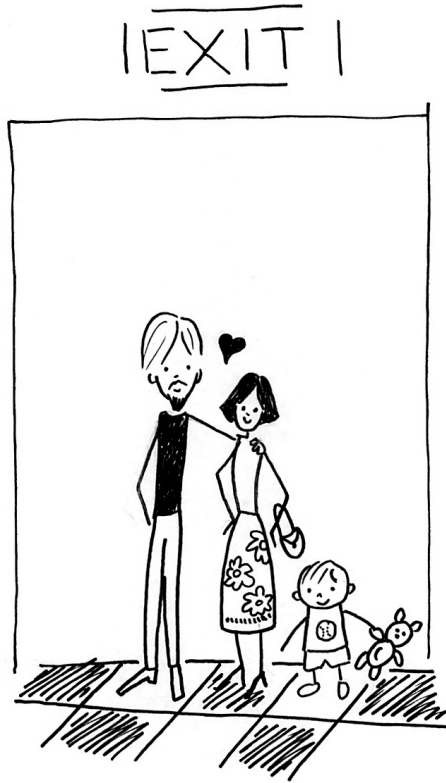
1. Evan Carlson
2. James Powalski

At first, I thought both guys were AWESOME. Boy, was I WRONG.

Wrong + Wrong ≠ Mr. Right

See the problem? Anyway, I was about to put the pizza down on the table when Kara looked over my shoulder and said, "Hey, an *absolutely adorable* guy just walked in who totally looks like a third wheel! Let's invite him to sit with you!"

I looked over my shoulder. I shouldn't have.



For one thing, it was just a kindergartner with his mom and dad. Very funny, Kara. For another, it turns out that carrying an extra-large triple-cheese pizza requires full concentration, and in the moment that I turned my head, I felt the tray slipping from my grip. I dug my thumbs into the piping-hot crust to try to keep the pizza from falling.

Why is it that when you sink your teeth into hot pizza dough you're like, "Mmmmm," but when you sink your thumbs into it you're like, "YEEEEOOOOWWWWWWWW!"

Right then I had a slo-mo mo. (Slow-motion moment. You know, one of those moments that only takes, like, five seconds, but because the five seconds are so MORTIFYING, they seem to drag on for an ETERNITY.)



Believe it or not, I managed to hold on to the pizza. Well, most of it. The crust was saved! But the triple cheese slid into an asymmetrical pile on the red-and-white-tiled floor.

"Tabbi!" cried Chip and Kara at the exact same time.

I was too mesmerized to say *jinx*, though. I just stood there, staring at the ruined cheese. Then I realized I was witnessing something *more* than just a pile of cheese. Something unbelievable. Something amazing. A sign!

I slammed the tray down on the table and whipped out my cell phone. In less than thirty seconds, I had eight photos of the cheesy floor.

“What are you *doing*?” asked Kara.

I pointed to the cheese. “Don’t you see? It looks *exactly* like a guy’s head!”

“Not to me,” said Kara.

“That’s because you’re looking at it upside down. Come over here.”

Kara slid out of the booth and stood next to me.

Chip grabbed the pizza tray. “I’m gonna see if they’ll throw more cheese on this pie. And if they will . . .” He looked directly at me. “You’re eating the pieces with the thumb holes in the crust.”

“Oh. Well.” I turned back to the cheese and pointed. “See, Kara, that’s the ear. And that lump there is the nose.”

“Hmmm,” said Kara in a way that made clear she wasn’t seeing what I was.

“And this is his hairline.” I pointed to a jagged edge that jutted out from the gooey forehead. “Don’t you think it looks exactly like a guy?”

“I guess I can kind of see it,” said Kara.

“Kind of see it? I’ll tell you what I see: the image of my future crush. Look at that handsome profile! He’s perfect for me!”

I was *not* backing down until Kara admitted she saw cheese guy. Tabbi Reddy never gives up, and she never backs down!

Kara squinched up her face and tilted her head.

About then a waitress came over with a trash can and a dustpan. She started to kneel next to the cheese head.

“Wait!” I cried. I pointed to a crack in the cheese that was CLEARLY an eye. “Here’s the eye. *Now* can you see him?”

Kara looked like she was concentrating. “Yes! I see him! I really do!” She seemed to mean it. She turned to the waitress and said, “Look! See how that cheese is shaped like a guy’s head?”

“I just see someone else’s mess that I have to clean up,” the waitress said. “And two crazy girls.” She scooped up the cheese head in a single swoop and dumped him into the trash can.

Some people have no vision.

Kara and I slid back into the booth. I excitedly scrolled through the cheese pics on my cell. “This is the best day of my life!” I said.

“You’re either overreacting,” said Kara, “or losing it.”

“Am not! That pile of cheese was a sign — a sign from the universe that the right guy is out there for me after all!”

“Or maybe it was only a pile of cheese,” said Kara.

I scowled.

“That looked remarkably like a head,” she added quickly.

“Think about it,” I said. “One tiny MILLISEC after I said *I’ll never find the right guy*, the universe tipped my hands forward and the cheese slid off of the pizza and landed

in the *exact* shape of a guy's head. Maybe even the *right* guy's head!" I waved the picture on my phone in front of her face.

Kara looked skeptical. "Or . . . it's possible that the pizza fell because you were distracted . . . or clumsy."

"No," I said. "No way. I've carried pizza trays from that window to these tables tons of times and I've never dropped so much as a pepperoni. I'm telling you. It's a sign that predicts the future Mr. Right!"

Before Kara could comment, Chip interrupted. He plopped the pizza with its new single layer of cheese down on the table. "I'm starved. Let's eat!"

I glanced up at him and saw Maybelline and Alex B leaving. She was showing him something on her cell phone and laughing hysterically. He had his arm around her shoulders. I guess they were back together after all. ☺!

Amazing how an entire year can go by and nothing changes. Maybelline is starting off the school year with Alex B. And once again, I am starting off the school year with no one. The only thing that has really changed is Kara's boyfriend status.

Oh. Well. It's hard to be bummed about anything now that I've gotten a positive sign from the universe. And I think if I look closely enough, I'll find more signs. It doesn't matter if Kara agrees with me or not. When it comes to the future, I like to make my own predictions.

My prediction: The right guy is out there waiting for me to find him.