

Del and I walk hand in hand, heads in the air, into registration. Everyone gapes; no one even expected to see me back in school again, let alone holding hands with a boy.

Pilar and Donna are sitting at the back. Donna is admiring herself in a hand mirror and patting her nose with powder. Pilar is reading a tattered paperback. When Del and I take the desk next to them, Pilar looks up amazed and gives me a wary half-smile, like she isn't sure whether she should be acknowledging my existence or not. I don't wait to see what Donna's reaction is. I don't want to know.

Mrs Wilkins takes the register and on my way out asks to see me. 'You're back again, Apple,' she says, haphazardly stacking a pile of books under her arm.

'Yes, miss,' I say.

'Well, that's good news. Doctor Dillon was under the impression we were going to have to involve ...' Mrs Wilkins sees Del at my side and changes her mind about whatever it was she was going to say. 'OK, get to class. We can talk another time.'

On the way to English, Del and I run into Egan Winters in the corridor. He's talking loudly into his phone.

'All right, mate,' Del says.

Egan sees us and hangs up. 'Ugh. My brother winds me up. But that's what brothers do, I suppose.'