

AROUND THE WORLD



**LIBBY'S LESSON ABOUT MENTAL
HEALTH AND GENDER DYSPHORIA**



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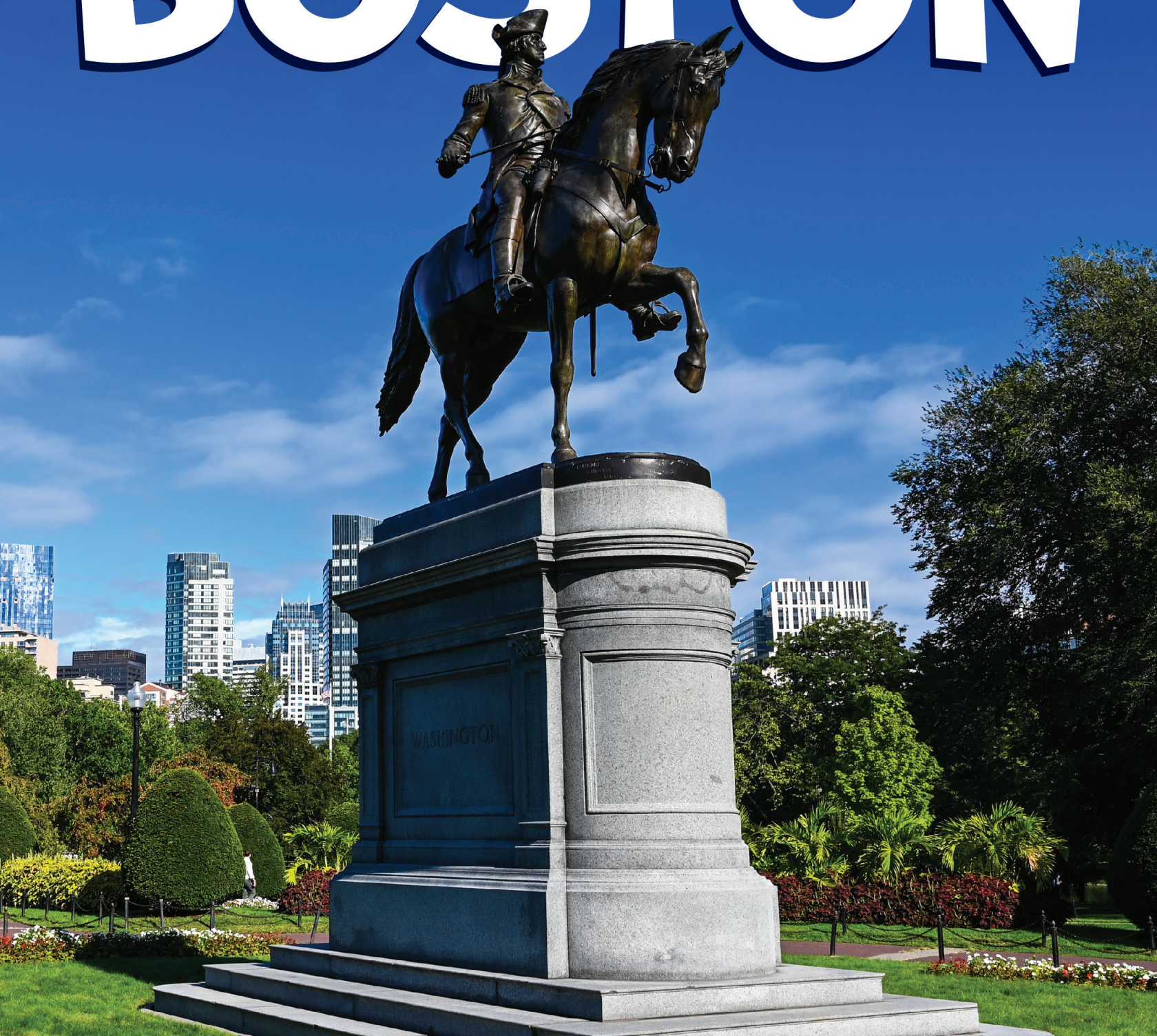
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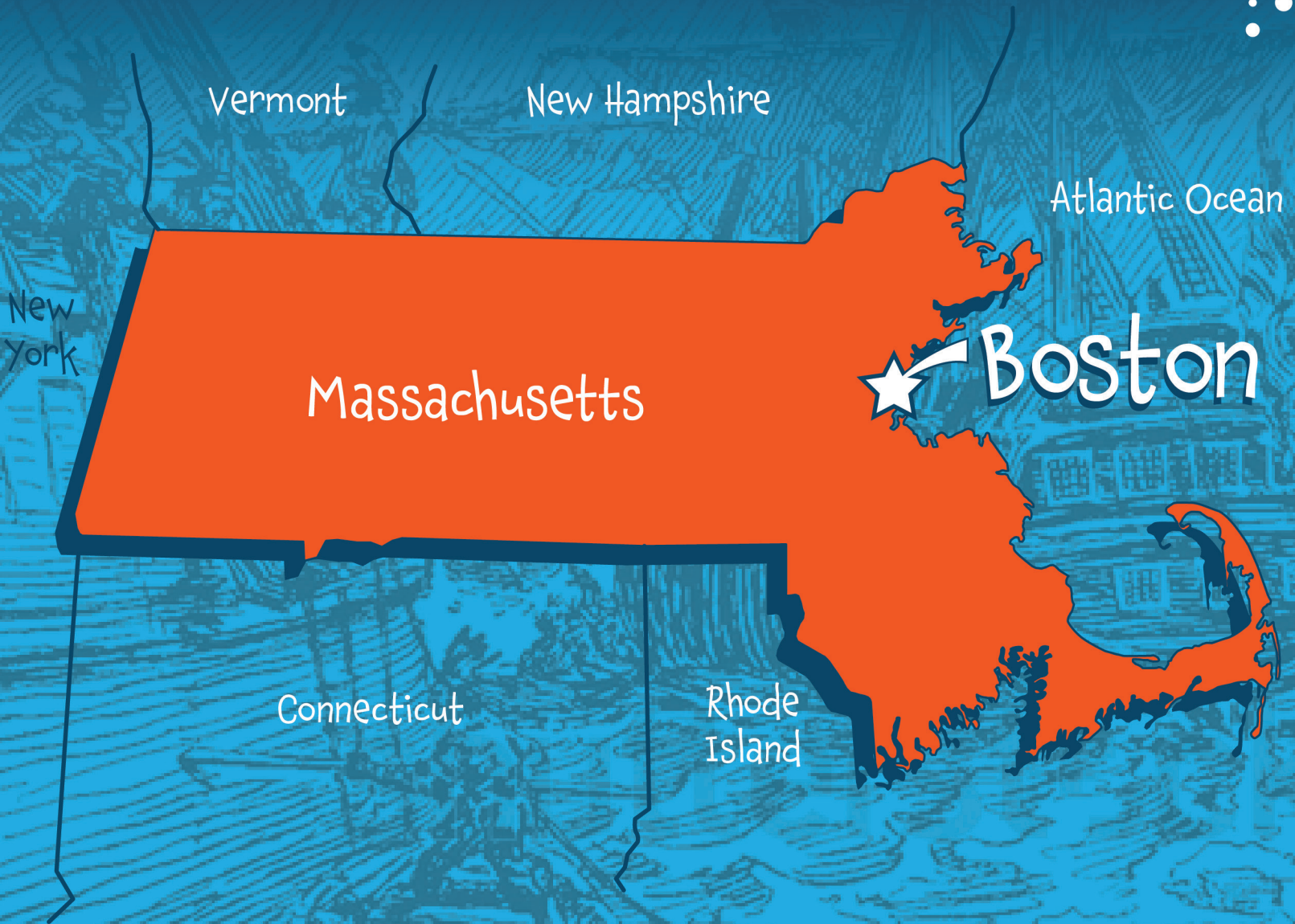
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WELCOME TO BOSTON





Welcome to Boston, the capital of Massachusetts and one of America's oldest cities.

Founded by Puritan settlers from England in 1630, Boston rose to prominence as New England's primary city for trade, government, and education. By the 1770s, Boston became the birthplace of the American Revolution when American colonists protested against "taxation without representation" by dumping crates of tea into the harbor in an event nicknamed the "Boston Tea Party."



As Boston prospered, it quickly grew into America's first intellectual hub. It became the birthplace of America's first public school as well as its first college, Harvard University, which originally trained Christian clergymen. Now, prestigious colleges like Boston University, Wellesley, Northeastern, and MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) carry the city's reputation as "The Athens of America"—a center of higher education and new ideas.





Throughout the centuries, Boston has been a center of **social change**. From igniting the American Revolution to calling for the abolition of slavery in the 1800s and fighting for civil rights in the 1960s, the city has often led the way with bold ideas. But some ideas—like allowing pre-teens and even children who identify as **transgender** to undergo sex change transitions or allowing men who identify as women to compete in women's sports—are stirring controversy and making life different for Boston's residents.

Social Change

Organized efforts to bring about changes in social structures, institutions, policies, or norms.

Transgender

A person who believes that their biological sex does not match their gender identity.

Meet Libby

This is Libby. She lives with her family in Cambridge, a city close to downtown Boston. Her father is a professor in Harvard University's Mathematics Department, and her mother works on campus in an administrative role. Ever since she was small, Libby dreamed of one day being a student, or even an assistant lecturer in her dad's Harvard math classes. She works hard in school, and her teachers say that she is a natural at math. Along with taking Advanced Placement or "AP" Calculus, Libby hopes that competitive swimming might give her a chance at a college scholarship. This year is her senior year, and she's training as hard as she can. Libby's coach tells her that if she keeps pushing herself and improving her **seed times**, she's likely to reach one of the top three spots that qualify for a full athletic **scholarship**. But when she isn't swimming or studying, Libby has another interest—making and posting short **reels** on social media with her best friend, Dani.

Seed Time

A swimmer's fastest time prior to a competition.

Scholarship

A financial award given to a student based on their academic achievements, talents, or other criteria to help them pursue education. Scholarships can be full, covering the entire cost, or partial, covering a portion or percentage.

Reel

A short, entertaining video shared on a social media website.



Pool Pals

Since they were young, Libby and Dani have always stuck together. When Libby and Dani were both infants, their moms met in a “Mommy and Me” swim class at the Cambridge YMCA. Since then, the two girls have gone to the same schools and many of the same swim lessons. Of course, even best friends have their differences. Libby is very social with friends, but Dani does not mind striking out on her own. While Libby enjoys painting her nails, doodling in her journal, and listening to K-Pop, Dani prefers being active. Playing video games with her dad, going for a hike, or shooting hoops at the park are more her cup of tea.

Both Dani and Libby swim competitively for their high school. Like Libby, Dani swims the backstroke, but she also swims breaststroke and freestyle; and she hopes to attend college on a swim scholarship. Her determination, speed, and tall, muscular build give her an advantage over Libby and many of the other swimmers. Of course, both girls cheer each other on. In the last couple years, Libby and Dani have also been posting together on a shared social media account.





Friends Through Thick and Thin

Despite their differences, and even though they are competing for a similar scholarship, Libby and Dani have supported each other through ups and downs. With a best friend who's always ready to be a listening ear, the pressures of school, swimming, friend groups, and the occasional date with a boy have all felt a little more manageable.

But nothing tested their friendship as hard as Libby's struggle with **body dysmorphia**, resulting in an eating disorder. This happened right when the girls' shared social media account was first taking off and gaining hundreds of followers and racking up loads of comments, many about the girls' looks.

The more Libby read compliments about her figure, the more she craved the praise. When she looked in the mirror, though, she worried that she was still not slim enough. She became obsessed with losing weight and started skipping meals. The skinnier she got, the more praise she received in the comments, reinforcing her habit, until she was barely eating anything at all.

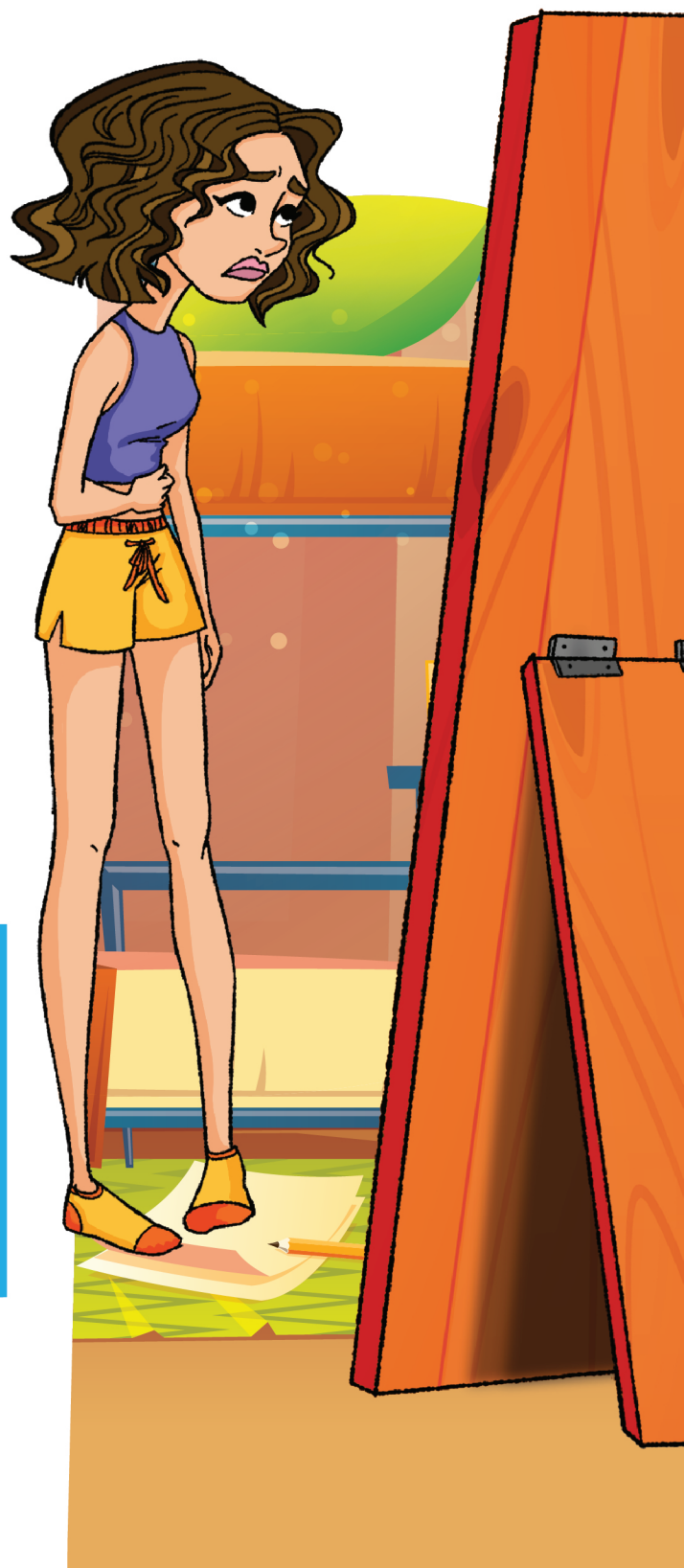
Dani grew concerned about her best friend. Libby's test scores suffered, her swim times grew worse, and her energy dropped to the point where she could hardly focus. Meanwhile, Libby's mom and dad reached out to Dani and shared their plans for an **intervention**.

Body Dysmorphia

A mental health condition where a person spends excessive time worrying about flaws in their appearance.

Intervention

A plan, usually among family, close friends, and a mental health professional, to help someone confront a problem or addiction.



Mental Health and Social Media

As Libby and Dani are learning, social media comes with a dangerous side, particularly for **mental health**. Of course, there are positives. But people often get discouraged when they constantly see images, posts, or comments showing others' seemingly perfect lives. Studies are finding that excessive social media use can reinforce feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, or even a low perception of one's body image. Sadly, for teenagers, the rise in social media use corresponds to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and feeling rejected or criticized by peers. Having a social media following can also nudge people to see themselves through the lens of what others say about them online.

With limits and in moderation, social media has benefits. A study from Harvard even found that regular, limited social media activity corresponds to feelings of "social well-being and positive mental health." For people who live far away from each other, social media lets them stay in touch. Social media can also be a creative outlet, a way to learn marketing and entrepreneurial skills, or a platform for finding people with similar interests.

But there's another danger—social media's potential to create addiction-like behaviors by releasing **dopamine**, a powerful brain chemical that brings feelings of reward and pleasure. Social media is designed to release dopamine through likes, comments, and followers; and for many people, that's addictive. Alarming, in a 2019 survey of American internet users between the ages of 18 and 22, forty percent of the participants admitted that they felt addicted to social media. Libby's spiral into an eating disorder because she wanted to look as thin and attractive as people described in their comments is an example of this. She's since learned that the constant notifications, updates, and comments create a cycle of seeking more and more engagement. Finally, social media addictions can push people to harm themselves, or even follow dangerous trends.

As Libby and Dani navigate the different sides of social media, one takeaway is clear enough—as fun and exciting as social media is, real, in-person friendship is much more important.



Mental Health

Our emotional, psychological, and social well-being.



Dopamine

A neurotransmitter in the brain that reinforces behavior with rewarding feelings of pleasure.



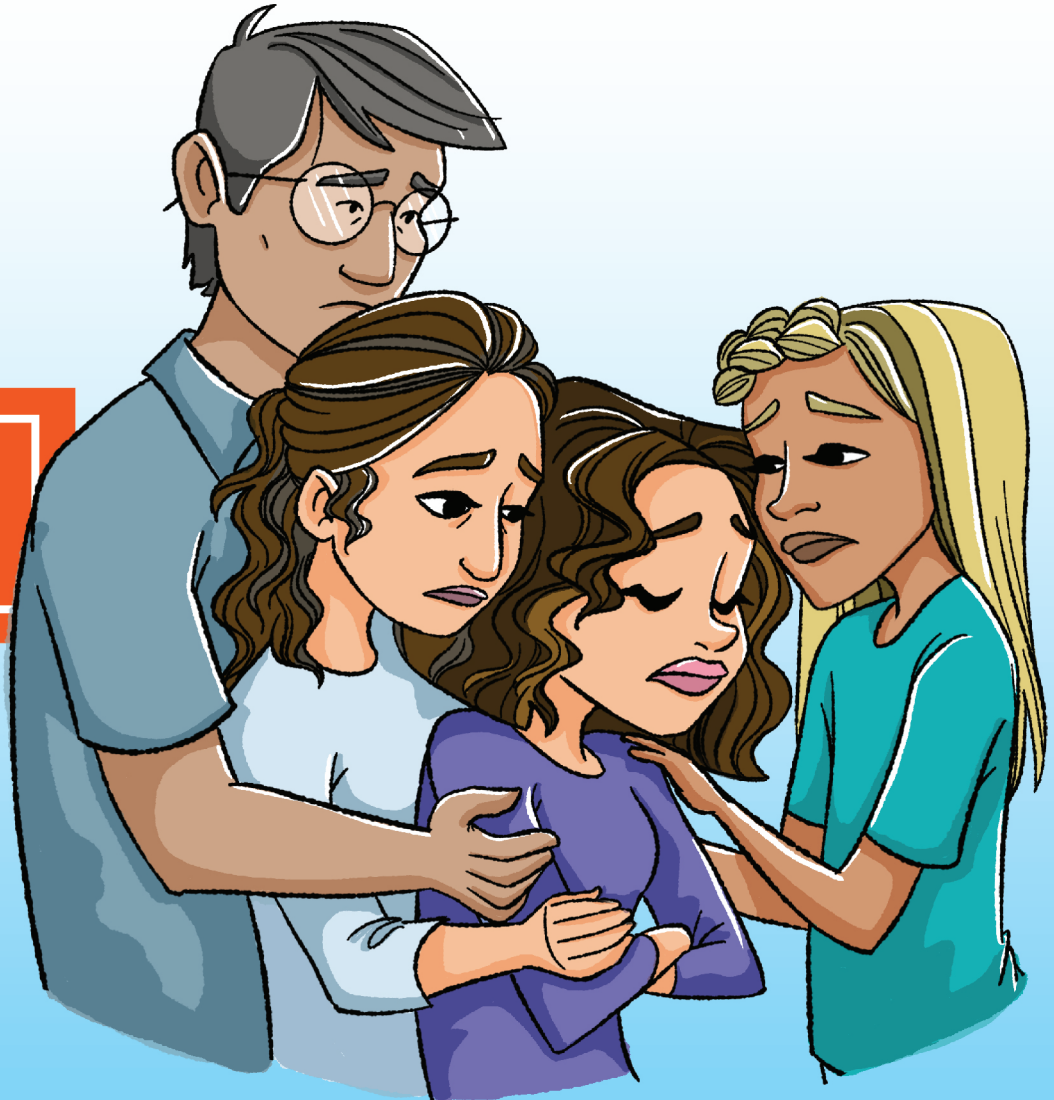
The Intervention

Over a few tearful hours, everyone expressed their fears about Libby's weight loss, declining health, and the negative effects of her constant social media use. Dani even stated that she would rather shut down their account altogether than risk the health of her friend. With a firm hug from Dani and her parents, Libby realized what was happening and what she needed to do.

She took a long break from social media, and that gave her time to reflect on how people's comments and **affirmation** had become a drug. People, she realized, would always have opinions on her appearance; but she could not let those opinions force her toward unhealthy choices or affect how she saw herself.

Affirmation

Emotional support or encouragement.

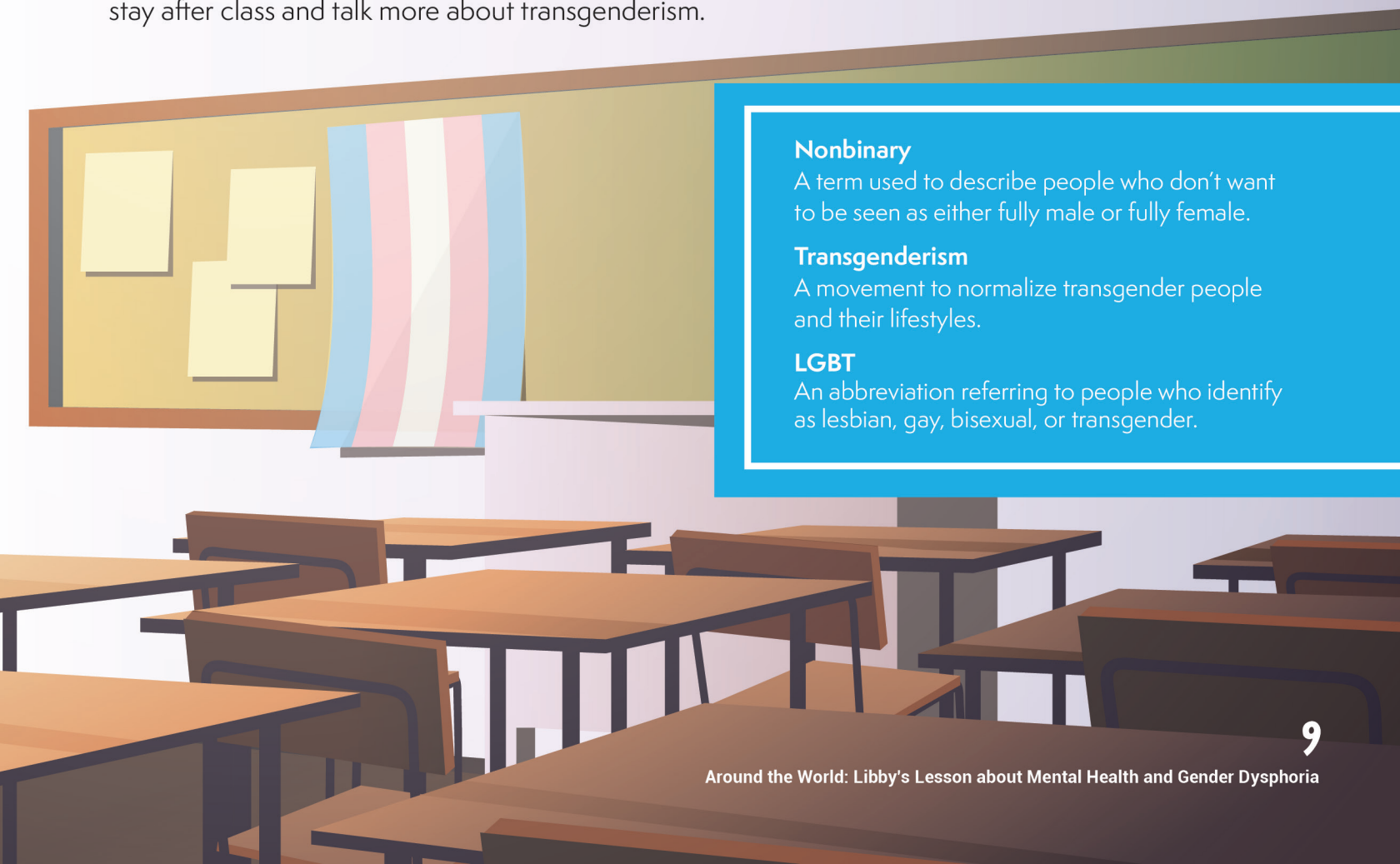




School Pride

Dani and Libby had a blast at their school's Winter Ball. With swim practice, upcoming meets, and AP tests in a few months, both girls are trying to make the most of their senior year. They both share an English teacher that they like: Ms. Wagner. A few weeks into the school year, they were a little surprised when Ms. Wagner announced that she was **nonbinary**. What's more, Ms. Wagner told the entire class that her pronouns were "*they/them*" and that students should address her as "Wagner," not "Miss Wagner." Dani and Libby found that odd. None of their other teachers had shared such personal information that openly before.

Recently, "Wagner" has been pausing lessons to talk about **transgenderism**. For a few days in a row, the class didn't even get to their reading of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, something Libby was really enjoying. One day, they walked into the classroom and noticed a new flag beside the American flag. This one had pink and light blue stripes; their teacher explained that it was called the Transgender Pride Flag. A conversation about supporting **LGBT** individuals and understanding what they go through on a daily basis took up the whole class period. Wagner went on and on about how some transgender individuals refuse to acknowledge the signs that they belong in a different body. As a homework assignment, Wagner asked that everybody write about their favorite LGBT hero. Without thinking much about it, Libby wrote about a fashion designer. Some students, like Emerson, a swimmer on their school's boys' team who usually comes in last, and even Dani have accepted Wagner's offer to stay after class and talk more about transgenderism.



Nonbinary

A term used to describe people who don't want to be seen as either fully male or fully female.

Transgenderism

A movement to normalize transgender people and their lifestyles.

LGBT

An abbreviation referring to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.



Watching a Friend Change



Libby is worried about Dani. Lately, she's seemed moody, withdrawn, and not her usual, active self. When swim practice ends, she's been going home immediately, without even checking in with Libby. Just a few weeks ago, Dani was excited about the reels they were posting together, but now, Libby's the only one posting on their account. That's unusual.

One afternoon, Libby finally caught Dani walking home from practice. They stopped and sat on a bench.

"What's up with you?" Libby asked. "We haven't talked in nearly a week."

"You can't tell anyone, Lib," Dani said. "But I've been talking to Wagner after class."

Libby stiffened. *What were they talking about?*

"It's hard for you to understand," Dani said. "You're petite and pretty. When we post videos, you don't even need a **filter**."

"What are you getting at?" Libby asked.

"I'm none of those things," Dani replied. "I look different. I have this... I don't know, *masculine* energy. You know I've always been a **tomboy**."

"So what?" Libby said, shaking her head. "You're tall and athletic, and there's nothing wrong with that."

"I know," Dani said. "I just think Wagner might be right... I think I might be trapped in the wrong body."

The more Dani talked, the less Libby knew what to say. She'd never, ever heard Dani doubt her body and identity like this. Wanting to support her best friend, she listened and nodded, even though what she was hearing did *not* sound like the Dani she knew. When Dani asked her not to tell anyone, and to say nothing to her mom, Libby was shocked. Dani and her mom were very close; they shared almost everything.

Filter

A social media feature that lets people easily enhance images of themselves.

Tomboy

A girl who enjoys rough, outdoorsy activities usually associated with boys.

The background features a stylized illustration of a tree with dark brown branches and olive green foliage on the right side. To the left, there are light blue and green shapes representing water and land. The title 'Sudden Changes' is written in a white, sans-serif font across the top center.

Sudden Changes

Hearing Dani's thoughts about being trapped in the wrong body was jarring enough. But knowing that Dani is hiding those thoughts from her parents is making Libby uneasy. She knows that telling Dani's mom would be going behind her best friend's back. Worse, everyone at school seems to be talking about supporting transgender individuals and being an **"ally"** instead of a hateful **transphobe**. Libby certainly doesn't want her friends and teammates thinking that she *hates* anyone.

Meanwhile, her best friend since childhood is changing before her eyes. Dani's race times are worse than usual, and she isn't showing up to all her classes. When she does show up, she seems unfocused. While Libby's conscience is weighing on her, she's also focused on her racing, and keeping her mind on qualifying for a scholarship with one of those top three spots.

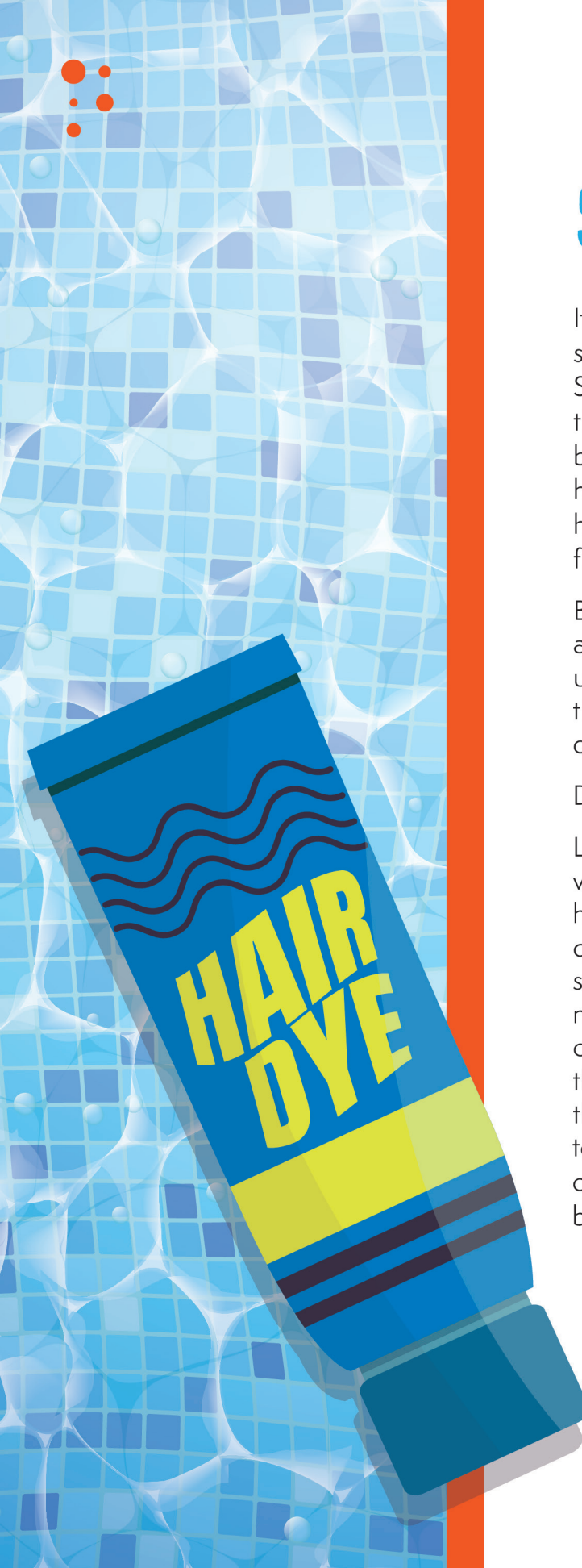
One day during practice, Libby shaved nearly three seconds off her 100 meter backstroke. With the whole team standing and applauding, Libby heard someone nearby make a remark: "Looks *and* speed. What else does she need?" With everyone else congratulating her, she caught Dani, seemingly angry, leaving the pool early out of the corner of her eye. Libby felt astonished. Had she done something wrong? Why would Dani be jealous of her setting a new personal best? Later that week, when Libby noticed Dani sitting in the school counselor's office with their English teacher, she had a sudden feeling that something was very wrong.

Ally

A person, organization, or country that supports another person, group, or nation in achieving a common goal or in times of conflict. The word is used by the LGBT movement to mean a person who supports or stands up for them.

Transphobe

Someone with a strong dislike or fear of transgender individuals.



Spring Break Weekend

It's spring break at last! Libby, Dani, and a few friends are spending the weekend at a teammate's house on the Quincy Shore. After relaxing near the water and then lounging on the couch for a movie, Dani brought out a pack of bright blue hair dye. Taken by surprise, Libby watched as her friends helped Dani dye her hair, cut it short, and shave one side of her temple in a bold new look. When the haircut was finished, the phones came out immediately.

Before long, Dani had posted a reel showing off her new hair and announcing that she would now be going by "Dan" and using "he" and "him" pronouns. Shocked, and without thinking, Libby asked if her parents knew about this sudden change in her identity.

Dani shot her a mean look. "I'll tell them when I'm ready."

Libby felt a chill along her spine. She knew Dani's mom was very supportive and trusting; when she saw the new short hair, she'd probably say that she likes it and wouldn't even ask questions. She knew that neither of Dani's parents are on social media. If Dani wasn't planning to tell them about her new identity and her new pronouns, they would have no way of knowing. Libby knew deep down that it is wrong to keep things from parents. But as she watched Dani's friends share the reel with all of their friends, Libby felt cornered. If she told Dani's parents, or if she expressed any kind of concern over Dani's sudden choice to **come out** as transgender, she'd be called a transphobe and her friends might abandon her.



As the weekend unfolded, Dani stayed glued to her phone. Her reel with the new hair and the new pronouns went viral, flooding the account with thousands of views and hundreds of likes and comments. Seeing Dani light up when she read comments affirming her new identity made Libby remember how she felt when everybody was posting comments praising her thin body a year ago. She remembered how all those likes and comments accelerated her spiral into body dysmorphia. Libby wondered: were comments praising someone's identity instead of their body just as addicting? But when the weekend ended, Libby hugged Dani and said goodbye without saying anything else.



Come Out

A term used by the LGBT community. When someone "comes out" it means they let everyone else know about their non-conforming sexual or gender identity.



Peer Pressure and Social Contagions

As Libby is finding out, coming out as transgender or nonbinary is much more common for people her age now than it ever was. In fact, as many as 1.9% of people born between 1997 and 2004 are coming out as transgender, which is more than any generation in history. Among her grandparent's generation, the number was 0.05% of the population. Seeing how much advocates, social media, and affirmation from peers is involved, Libby wonders if being transgender is another **social contagion**. Like eating disorders or some of the dangerous Tik Tok challenges she's heard about, are more people deciding to come out as trans because many others are doing it? Because "coming out" offers praise, attention, and social media dopamine? Or, as her English teacher insists, are large numbers of people her age "coming out" because they were born that way?

When she thinks about Dani's sudden change to "Dan," Libby finds her teacher's argument hard to believe. While Dani has always been assertive, competitive, and more muscular than other girls, this is the first time she's ever been overly insecure about her gender. Prior to Wagner's class and all the attention she's getting on social media, Dani never seemed or acted uncomfortable in a female body. Just a month ago, she had a blast getting her hair and makeup ready for Winter Ball. Dani and her mom often spend an entire weekend shopping for girl's clothes at Boston's offbeat thrift stores—and Libby knows how many crushes Dani has had on boys over the years. But if this isn't the real Dani, then why is she acting this way?

As it turns out, Libby's hunch has a lot of truth to it. Through her own research, Libby is finding studies and articles that are very concerning. One study by physician Lisa Littman surveyed hundreds of teens like Dani, who came out as trans but had no symptoms of **gender dysphoria** before puberty. Most of those surveyed were isolated from their parents, surrounded by friends in

the LGBT community, and getting all their information from supporters of the trans movement. That makes Libby even more worried. As the weeks go on, Dani is spending lots of free time with Wagner and members of the school's Trans Allies Club. Dani is posting more reels on their social media account, but they're all focused on LGBT issues and her own evolving identity. Libby worries that the massive attention from friends, "allies," and new followers is pushing Dani further away from her family, her scholarship goal, and her old self.

Social Contagion

When an idea, attitude, or harmful behavior spreads among people through pressure and social interaction.

Gender Dysphoria

A condition of feeling uncomfortable in one's body, and that one would feel more comfortable in a body of the other sex.



A Tipping Point

With swim meets and AP exams coming up, Dani and Libby are blowing off steam by catching a movie. For Libby, the movie date was a relief. Relaxing with her best friend and not having to talk about her new identity or pronouns made everything feel better, almost like it was before Dani came out as trans. But on the way home from the theater, Dani shared something shocking.

"So, I won't be at practice next weekend because... I'm seeing a doctor," Dani said.

"Is everything okay?" Libby asked.

Dani chuckled. "No, it's not like that. This is a doctor Wagner recommended. I'm hoping to start **hormone therapy** so I can transition to a male body."

Libby was silent.

Again, she listened to Dani's excitement. From talking to Wagner, and hearing that Emerson, their classmate who came out as a trans woman, had begun hormone therapy with the same doctor on his very first visit, Dani had grown convinced that this was the right step for her. As Dani shared her plan to tell her mom that she was going to practice like normal, but then catch a ride with Wagner to the doctor, Libby grew angry.

"I can't believe you're doing this," Libby said, shocking both of them. "What are you thinking, Dani?"

"What?" Dani stammered, genuinely surprised. "I thought you were an *ally*—"

"You're starting a dangerous treatment," Libby went on, "something that will *change* your body, something many people regret doing... and you're not telling your mom?"

They paused.

"It's *my* choice, Lib," Dani replied.

"Your parents love you," Libby said. "Your choices impact them. This is a *huge* decision."

But the more Libby reasoned with her, the less Dani listened.

Dani said that she was not surprised. She told Libby that Wagner and her friends at the trans club *warned* her people might react this way.

Hormone Therapy

The use of chemicals to bring about changes to the body, such as altering sexual characteristics.



"You don't understand," Dani snarled, wiping a tear away. "You're popular and attractive. You don't get what I'm going through."

This hurt. But knowing that her friend's physical health was at stake, Libby didn't budge.

"Maybe you're right," she said, feeling her eyes moisten. "But I remember when I was obsessing over everyone's comments and starving myself, *you* called me out." She paused. "But who's obsessed with social media now?"

Dani blushed. At least she was listening.

"What kind of friend am I if I lie to you?" Libby pleaded. "If I smile and tell you what you're doing isn't reckless and dangerous? Your mom *needs* to know."

"I'll tell her eventually," Dani said. "Once I get my **transition timeline**, I'll think about when I want to do that."

"All right," Libby said, surprising herself again. "If you're not telling her, then I'm shutting down our social media account."

Dani's jaw dropped. They argued some more, and then Dani stormed off. As quickly as she could, Libby took out her phone, opened the account's security settings, and changed the password to lock Dani out.

The thought of Dani hating her or never talking to her again was so painful. But maybe being cut off from social media might give Dani a chance to slow down and think everything through without the online chatter before changing her body in an irreversible way.



Transition Timeline

A schedule, usually agreed on by a doctor, for someone who wants to change their body to make it look more like a different gender.



Thick and Thin... All Over Again

Libby and Dani have not spoken since their argument. With the social media account on pause, and with so much else to focus on, Libby has also been taking a break from social media. She's texting Dani a few times a week, just to remind her best friend that she cares about her and is thinking about her. So far, Dani has not texted back. Since Libby switched out of Wagner's class, which meant having to change her whole schedule, she no longer sees Dani outside of practice.

When the day of Dani's doctor appointment came around, Libby was shocked that Dani showed up to practice instead. Quiet and focused, and even with her short hair, Dani seemed a little more like her old self. Was that a good sign? Had she gone for another appointment without telling anyone? Libby did not know. But after seeing Dani race hard like she did before and getting her fast seed times back, she's hopeful.



Crunch Time

One day at practice, Libby's coach blew her whistle and the team gathered around. After catching her breath, Libby realized how nervous she felt. After training so hard, she was about to learn if she had earned a chance at a swim scholarship or not.

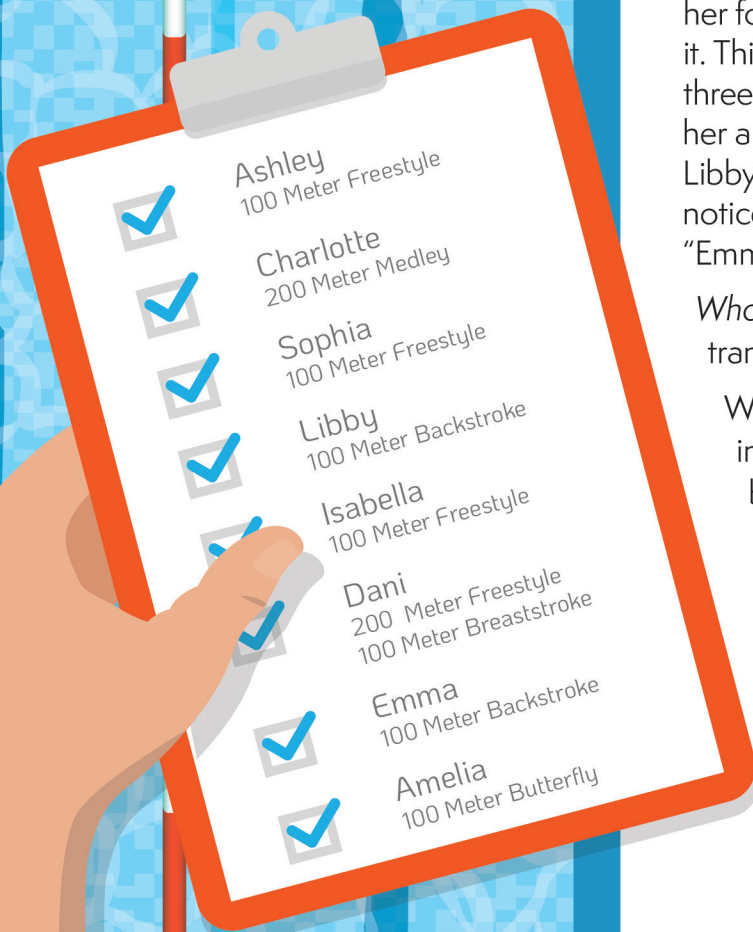
"Next meet is the big one," her coach said, handing around a list of swim times. "You've all worked hard... but here's where everyone stands going into it."

Quiet and excited, the whole team huddled together as the coach's list moved around. The list told them who would be racing during the meet and in what events. When Libby saw that her times had qualified her for the 100 meter backstroke, she couldn't believe it. This would be her chance to land one of the top three positions and convince a college scout to give her a scholarship! With friends congratulating her, Libby felt the relief crash over her in a wave. But she noticed that a new swimmer, someone named "Emma," would also be swimming in the same race.

Who's Emma? Libby thought. Maybe an incoming transfer student?

When the list came around to Dani, she broke into a smile. She had qualified for freestyle and breaststroke: her two strongest events. This meant she had a strong chance to land in the top three overall spots, and a scholarship was surely in her grasp. Libby congratulated her, and Dani smiled back.

"Do you want to celebrate?" Dani asked, proffering a hopeful look. "Boba's on me."



Heart to Heart

Once again, and over some sweet, tasty boba, Libby's giving her best friend a listening ear. But this time, instead of asking Libby to keep uncomfortable secrets from their parents, Dani is thanking her.

"You did the right thing," Dani said. "I was so angry when you locked me out... but that made me stop and think about some questions I was just avoiding."

"On your appointment day," Libby said, suddenly nervous, "you came to practice. Does that mean—"

"I skipped the appointment," Dani said. "I was thinking about what you said, about how dangerous it is... Wagner never mentioned that. The day before, I was texting my friends at trans club, telling them I was unsure... but they just kept pressuring me. That felt wrong. So when the day came, I ghosted. I just didn't show up."

The more Dani spoke, the more she sounded like her old self. When her eyes moistened and her voice grew shaky, Libby reached over and hugged her—and Dani hugged back.

"I'm scared," Dani said. "I don't know what happened. I thought they were my friends, but now they won't talk to me. I'm not in the *wrong* body. I don't want to *change* my body—but I almost did. What will my parents say?"

From there, the girls talked over a plan. That Saturday, Dani would sit her parents down and tell them what had almost happened. She'd do all the talking, and she'd be completely honest; but Libby would be right there beside her.





Making a Plan

As Libby suspected, Dani's parents were shocked to hear that Dani had briefly come out as trans—they'd had no idea. Dani explained that taking time away from friends and social media had given her time to think. She'd realized that it had been wrong and dangerous to keep her entire struggle, and a potentially life-changing choice, from her parents, the two people who care about her most.

Together, they all agreed on a few things. That week, Dani would transfer out of Wagner's class and leave the Trans Allies Club. Dani's mom would check in with her once a day, and Dani would immediately text her back. Libby and Dani both agreed to focus on swimming and to keep the social media account shut down for a while. They had a solid plan, and soon Dani was smiling, joking around, and sounding confident again.





Counting Down

With graduation looming and the big meet coming up, both girls want to finish strong. Nabbing one of those top three spots would secure a full scholarship to college, and everyone knows it; so the whole team has been training hard. Libby knows that if she can match her personal best time, she might be able to secure the third-place spot. Dani's times are almost guaranteed to put her in first or second, even with the recent distractions she's had to endure.

Sadly, Dani is facing some harassment from her former friends in the trans club. Rumors have spread that Dani only came out as trans for "the attention" and one student accused her of harming real trans kids by "faking" it. The last time Libby checked their social media account, she saw all kinds of hateful comments. But with Libby and her parents encouraging her, Dani is staying strong and on course. She's realized that both the praise when she "came out" and the hurtful rumors now are coming from people who don't actually care about her health or well-being.





Wildcard...

A couple of weeks before the big meet, Libby received another shock when she showed up to practice and found Emerson from the boys' team wearing a girls' swimsuit. She knew he had begun hormone therapy and now identifies as a trans woman, but when she heard everyone call him "Emma," she immediately recognized the name from her coach's list. That's the mysterious swimmer she'd be racing against! A 6'2", biological *man*! How on Earth was that fair?

When Libby told her parents, her dad immediately called the coach in protest—but with the school district getting praise for letting the "first brave trans" student race according to his gender identity, he realized that the coach's hands were tied.



Biological Advantage

Biology and body structure give men a natural athletic advantage over women.
Here's how it breaks down:

Height

On average, men are about 8% taller than women.

Testosterone

Men have more testosterone than women, which plays a role in growing greater muscle volume and bone density.

Muscle Volume

On average, a woman's body is about 30-35% muscle by weight; a man's body is about 40-45%.

Body Strength

On average, women have about two-thirds the strength of men.

Lungs and Oxygen

With a larger average lung volume, male athletes have a greater oxygen carrying capacity than females. This means males can undergo intense exercise while consuming the same amount of oxygen, allowing them to reach their training peak earlier than women.

Endurance

Female bodies are more efficient at converting calories to energy. This gives female athletes a slight advantage to males in sports involving very long distances, such as ultra-running.

Bone Structure

Male athletes have, on average, larger bone structure than females, giving them a mechanical advantage.



Due to these differences, it is important for women to compete against women and men to compete against men in sports. For example, compare the top scores in these events between high school boys and female Olympic finalists:

	2016 U.S. High School Boys	2016 Olympic Women's Finalists
100 Meter Race	10.44 sec	10.71 sec
High Jump	2.09 meters	1.97 meters
100 Meter Freestyle Swim	50.09 sec	52.70 sec
200 Meter Butterfly Swim	1 min. 59.76 sec	2 min. 4.85 sec



A Rigged Race?

Last season and earlier that year, Emerson had been a below-average competitor. His times were among the very last on the boys' swim team. While she doesn't know for sure, and while it's obvious that Emerson is getting the same kind of praise and affirmation about his new identity that Dani experienced, Libby thinks it's a little *too* convenient that "Emma," the weakest male swimmer, now insists on racing with the girls. Watching "Emma" at practice is filling Libby with dread. With the swim meet coming up, his times have dominated the top of the girls' team list, knocking Dani down into second or even third place in some events. Libby is lucky to place fourth in their practice races now. Dani and Libby are realizing that for all their hard work, neither of them can match the natural speed, size, and muscular strength of his male body.

Sadly, they're not alone. As colleges and high schools across the country bend the rules to allow biological males who identify as females to compete with females in all kinds of sports, those trans athletes are breaking record after record. Seeing this play out in the news and at her very own pool is discouraging for Libby. Unlike Dani, who is naturally stronger and will be racing in two different events at the meet, Libby's only chance to qualify for one of the top three overall spots is in a race with "Emma," and now she will have to beat her personal best time by *a lot*, just for a shot at the third place slot. What can she possibly do?





Three, Two, One...

It's competition day: the final one of the year. Parents and students from all over Boston have packed out the pool's bleachers—and as promised, there are a dozen college recruiters there to watch. Libby is in her suit and cap, warmed up for the 100 meter backstroke, ready to give it her all.

It's an unfair race, and she knows it.

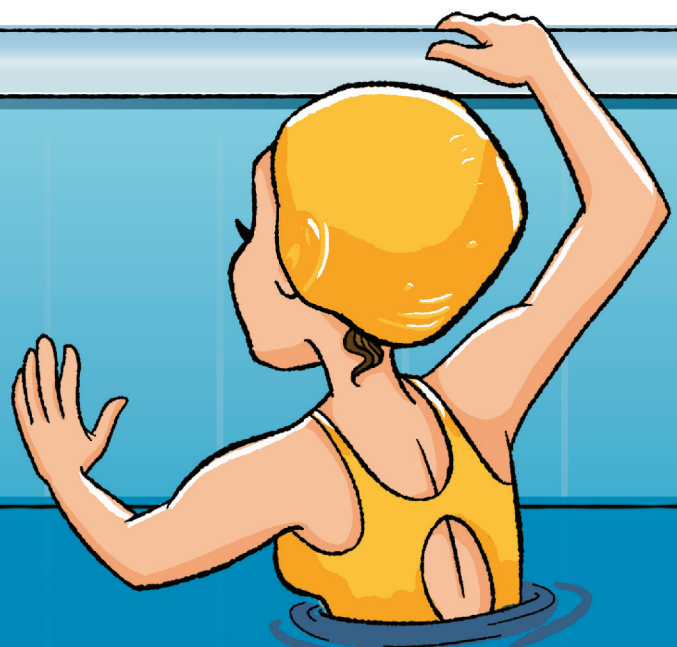
But while some of her teammates quietly agree with her, everyone else openly supports "Emma."

Libby knows that speaking out or protesting means getting labeled a transphobe, which could make the rounds on social media and possibly ruin her college career. She feels trapped—but the biggest encouragement is her best friend sitting next to her. The best friend who has already swam so well in her own events that she's solidly in second place.

"You got this," Dani says as Libby stands for her event.

In the pool, with her feet flat on the wall and her fingers on the diving block, Libby can just see Dani and both their parents watching her from the stands. Further down on the wall, "Emma" is bobbing up and down in anticipation. Libby tries to clear her mind, blocking out all the hurt and negativity. The scholarship may be an impossible goal now, but she has worked too hard to give up. When the buzzer rings out, she'll shoot off the wall with all her strength. She'll swim harder than she's ever swum, even if it doesn't matter anymore.

Libby knows that she's not alone—girls all around the world are facing impossible challenges and even being severely injured by biological males that have entered their sports. They need someone to speak up for them, and maybe Libby, with the support of her family and best friend, will find the courage to do it.





Recipe for Mini Boston Cream Pies

Delicious, mini versions of one of Boston's famous treats!

Ingredients:

- 1 package yellow cake mix + required ingredients
- 1 cup cold milk
- 1 package vanilla flavor instant pudding mix
- 1½ cups whipped cream
- 4 squares semi-sweet chocolate

Directions: (Ask a parent for help)

- Preheat oven to 350°F. Prepare cake batter, divide into 24 muffin pan cups, and bake as directed on the package. Remove muffins and allow them to cool completely.
- Combine milk and pudding mix, then beat together with wire whisk until well blended (about 2 min.). Let pudding stand for 5 min. while you cut the cupcakes horizontally in half. Gently stir 1/2 cup of the whipped cream into the pudding. Spoon about 1 Tbsp. of the pudding mixture onto the bottom half of each cupcake, then place the top half back on—like a sandwich!
- Put the remaining 1 cup of whipped cream and the chocolate squares in a small microwaveable bowl and microwave on high for 1 min. or until chocolate is almost melted. Stir until chocolate is completely melted and the mixture is blended together. Leave the chocolate mixture for 15 min. to thicken, then spread onto the top of the cupcakes. Refrigerate at least 15 min. before serving.





Writing Activity

Everyone struggles with self-esteem issues at some point, but Libby and Dani were both lucky to have a best friend who truly cared about them. Write a letter to your best friend or a family member, telling them what you appreciate and admire about them.



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