

Slammed

BY MARLENE PEREZ

When I saw the book just lying there on the bleachers, I wondered if you had left it there on purpose. If you had left it for me to see all those hateful things people said about me. About everyone.

No one had passed the slam book my way. What would I have done if they did? I'd like to think that I would have done the right thing and not written anything.

I turned to my page first. Now I understood why they called it a slam book. Because when I read what was written about me, I felt as though an invisible person was repeatedly slamming me into a wall. I couldn't even see who I was fighting.

Or could I? After I shook away the tears, my vision cleared and I recognized almost everyone's handwriting.

A guy from my chemistry class, the one who would smile

at me sometimes, wrote about how I'd performed a certain sexual favor for him. The only place that ever happened was in his imagination. And there was stuff from people who I thought were my friends, too. People like you. I recognized your handwriting right away but couldn't believe you had written those things. That my boobs were too big and that my brain was too small.

We weren't *best* friends or anything, but I thought we were friends. What about all those games we'd ridden to together? We double-dated for homecoming when we were sophomores. Remember? I held your hair back when you threw up all that cheap wine you and your date were guzzling. We talked about how your brother had died and even about getting out of this town, moving somewhere far away where nobody knew us.

I thumbed through the book and saw your handwriting on every page. You hated so many people, but most of all, I think you hated yourself.

I thought I knew you, but I didn't. I thought we were friends, but we weren't. Then you walked back into the gym, a panicked look on your face. You didn't see me right away, so I slid the book into my backpack.

"What's the matter? Lose something?" I asked.

You frowned, the panic on your face growing. "It's not important."

I met your eyes.

"I thought I lost something, too," I said. "Turns out I never even had it."