

The double  
life of  
**Rosalie**

**OPERATION  
NINJA BARBIE**

ÉDITIONS  
MICHEL  
QUINTIN

Ariane Charland

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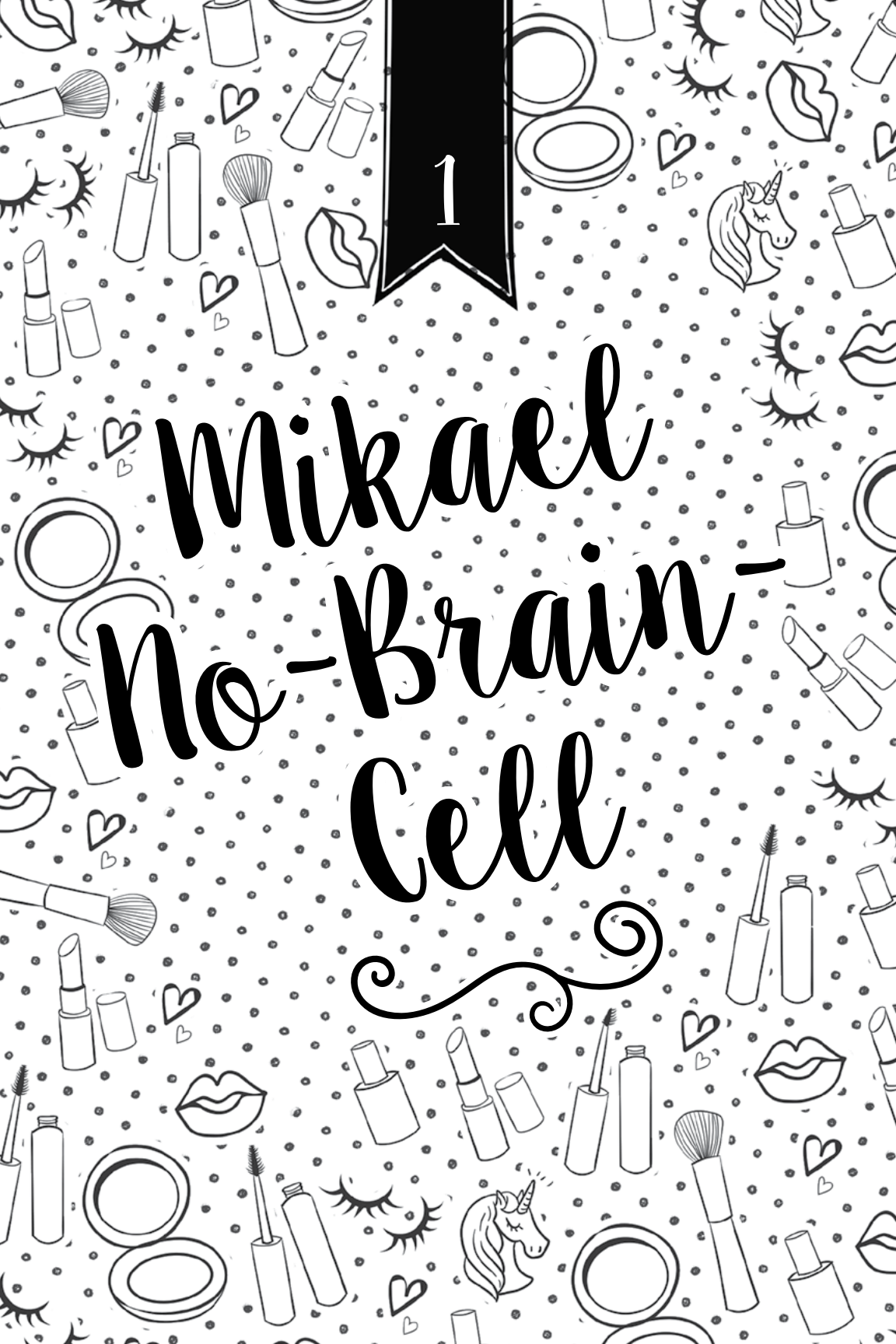
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# Mikael No-Brain- Cell





## ✂️ ÷ Operation Ninja Barbie ÷ ✂️

I hit the snooze button for the hundredth million time.

A tinny voice rings out in my bedroom.

— Rosalie Noel! Wake up! You're surrounded!

I sit up straight in my bed. I hear a strange buzzing noise through the window and a UFO appears between the hastily drawn curtains. The object moves and, this time, I see that it's the camouflage-patterned nose of a military helicopter. For a second, I think I'm in a war movie, but I quickly snap back to reality. This machine is too small to be carrying real soldiers. It's just one of the captain's remote-controlled toys.

When the staticky voice rings out again, I realize that it's not coming from the helicopter, but from the walkie-talkie on my desk. I get out of bed to grab it.

— Rosalie Noel! says the voice again. Get up! You're...

— It's alright, captain! I'm up! I reply as I press the rectangular button on the side of the walkie.

I take it back to bed, where I let myself sink onto



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my covers, ready to fall back asleep for nine whole minutes, when my alarm begins to wail again.

— You've got exactly fifteen minutes to get ready! says the captain's voice in my right hand.

**Dang!** I sit up to look at the alarm clock. The numbers are blurry. I open the case I keep under my pillow and put my glasses on. Re-dang! The captain's right. It's five to eight, classes begin at eight thirty and school's a twenty minute walk away. Do the math.

I get up in a flash, throw on my uniform, and dash out of my room.

Thump! Thump! Thump!

That's Wabbit, my obese dwarf rabbit, protesting by thumping the floor of his cage with his hind legs. I head back to my room and he sticks his nose between two bars and gives me a pitiful look. I crouch in front of him.

— I'm sorry, wab! I don't have time to play, I'm in a hurry.

Wabbit starts pushing at his cage door in an attempt to open it. Anyone who says that dwarf

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rabbits aren't the smartest creatures in the world has no sense themselves, if you ask me.

— *Ok, ok!* You can hop around my room if you promise not to chew on the furniture. The legs of my bed, my dresser, and my desk are covered in teeth marks, which infuriates my dad and Mac Linh, my stepmom. I lift the hook that locks the door grill in place. Lapou (Wabbit) hops outside and sniffs the ground in search of food. I take his food bowl out of the cage. He jumps on it. The way he's stuffing himself, you'd swear that the bowl is being emptied and magically refilled every two seconds.

Well, okay, maybe anyone who says dwarf rabbits aren't the smartest creatures in the world is right.

— Bye, wab! I say as I head out.

I close the door behind me and sneak a look into Antoine's room, just opposite. It's empty. His bed is made and his pyjamas are neatly folded and laid on his pillow. No wonder everyone at school calls him a nerd! I know that there's no link between being neat and being a nerd, but you have to admit no one





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you know folds their pyjamas and lays its on their pillow every morning. And, while we're at it, no one you know leaves a half-hour before the start of class to go photograph insects and spiders (because, no, they're not the same thing as Antoine keeps telling me).

Antoine is my *best friend*. Well, I don't know if you can call someone your best friend when you have no other friends. He's also my half-brother. The walkie-talkie is so we can talk to each other when we're both in our rooms. I imagine he gave his to the captain this morning, to make sure I didn't wake up too late.

After a lightning stop in the bathroom, where I didn't waste time washing up or combing my hair, I tear down the steps while trying to put on my jacket and backpack at the same time. While flailing around, I snag my glasses and they tumble into the living room on the ground floor, where I see the wool-slippered feet of grandma Nanette, who's drinking hot tea, grandma crochet, who made the slippers, and grandpa paunchy, who's chewing on

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a piece of sausage despite the fact it's still early in the day.

— Late again, Zaza? That ironic voice belongs to my other brother, well, my real brother, Benjamin.

He rolls his wheelchair over to where my glasses have landed and, one hand on his wheels, he reaches down to pick them up. I call out:

— No need! I'll do it!

I'm always afraid he'll fall over when he leans forward like that. He grabs my glasses and holds them out to me. His face is blurry, but I can sense that he's rolling his eyes. He hates when I try to stop him from doing something. In fact, he hates anyone who tries to do anything for him. I thank him as I put my glasses back on and then head to the kitchen for something to eat. On the way, I greet the three seniors in their rocking chairs. Grandma Nanette responds by raising her cup, grandma crochet by shaking one of her needles, and grandpa paunchy by grabbing another piece of sausage.

— I can't drive you now, Benjamin says as he





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turns his wheelchair round to follow me, but I can pick you up after school if you want. I'm meeting Christopher in the early afternoon. We're going to practice our throws before the next match. I can stop by the College on the way back.

— You have a match? Against another team?

Benjamin pivots the back of his wheelchair to balance on his back wheels. It's been barely a year and a half since he lost the use of his legs, but he's already as agile on four wheels as he was on two legs. A faint smile appears on his lips.

— Yes, Zaza, that's what a match is, two teams competing.

I bite my lip and say nothing. If I tell him that it worries me, we'll end up arguing and I really don't feel like it. I open the fridge and grab the lunch I'd made myself last night. I throw it in my backpack before grabbing the bottle of orange juice and gulping some down.

— I'll wait for you in the street ok? says Benjamin.

He never enters the school parking lot. The path wraps around the football grounds and I imagine

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that brings back too many bad memories for him. I close the fridge and take one of the croissants that Juliette the cook puts out on a plate for the seniors every morning.

— OK, I say as I bite into it, I'll let Anchoine know.

Benjamin drops his two front wheels down and gives himself a little push towards the lift leading down to the basement where his room is. I swallow my mouthful of croissant and call out after him:

— Thanks, Ben!

He looks back.

— Thanks for what?

— Thanks for picking us up after school.

— No need to thank me, I have no choice.

With that, he rolls into the lift and presses the button to go down. I stick my tongue out at him, but he doesn't see me because the door is closing.

Benjamin may have lost the use of his legs, but his talent for being annoying is still intact.

In his defence, I must admit it's true that he has





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no choice but to come pick us up. Not everyday, but at least several times a week, when his Cegep schedule allows it. That was one of the conditions our parents laid down when they paid for his car.

The kitchen clock says its seven minutes past eight. I have to run. I swallow the rest of my croissant and cross the living room.

— See you three this afternoon! I call out to grandma Nanette, grandma crochet, and grandpa paunchy.

I slip on my windbreaker without doing it up, and while I'm putting on my boots, grandma Nanette comes up. She takes a handful of mints from the bowl on the coffee table and slips them into my coat pocket.

— You have to eat! she tells me as she taps my cheek.

— But I just ate a croissant!

— That's not enough!

I could argue that mint candy hardly qualifies as a healthy food, but I have a confession to make: I'm

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addicted to them. I unwrap two and eat them right away. I love the feeling of freshness that comes with the taste of menthol. It's like brushing your teeth, isn't it? I thank grandma Nanette and turn to leave again when grandma crochet shows up with the tuque she's just finished knitting.

— You need to dress warmly, she lectures as she pulls it over my skull.

— It's not even cold!

— It doesn't matter!

Once outside, I stuff the tuque in my bag.

October is drawing to a close, but it's been hot all week. On the sidewalk, the captain continues piloting his remote-control helicopter. I go down the three balcony steps.

— You don't have a camera on that thing, I hope!

The captain flashes me a mischievous, *gap-toothed grin*.

— Not on that one.

He brandishes the walkie-talkie and adds:

— I didn't give you too much of a scare this morning?



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— Just enough! Did Antoine ask you to do that?

— No, your dad.

I groan. I should have guessed. It's usually he who wakes me up when I'm dawdling in bed, but this morning, he had to go run errands for the seniors' Halloween party.

In case you haven't already guessed, I live in an old age home. Not because I have early-onset dementia. Actually, none of our residents are senile. It's because my dad and Antoine's mom decided to buy a huge house that they then converted into a retirement home.

I wave goodbye to the captain and run all the way to school.

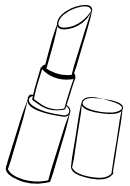
Twenty minutes later and a little winded, I'm tackling the slope that leads to the main entrance of Boisjoli College. The grassy embankment is packed. I zigzag between students and end up spotting Antoine near the picnic tables between the trees. Kneeling among the dead leaves, he's busy photographing I-don't-know-what in the grass. I make a beeline for him when I hear the roar of an engine

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behind me. Like all the other students, I turn to watch the blue convertible climbing the road and parking in front of the school. Behind the wheel, a witchy looking woman pauses to refresh her lipstick. It's Mikael-No-Brain-Cell and Maelie-the-Barbie's mom. The **M&M** twins, as they're also known, exit the car with smiles glinting and hair blowing in the wind.

Their mother leaves as soon as her tube of lipstick is back in the glove compartment. Without even waving goodbye to her kids, she steps on the gas and makes a u-turn, a pretty dangerous manoeuvre given how narrow the road is and how many teens are milling around. I don't know if it's her disdainful expression or her loud makeup, but I've always thought she'd be perfect for the role of Maleficent in Sleeping Beauty.

Like the celebrities they are (at least among the high-school students), Mikael and Maelie wave to their fans. They stop just short of signing autographs. While Alisha Singh, Maelie's little pet, takes her arm and chatters about nothing, Victor





Mikael No-Brain-Cell

Lavictoire, Mikael's disciple, fails to capture his idol's attention.

Mikael-No-Brain-Cell's brown eyes are scanning around for something, or rather someone, that they quickly find. That someone is Antoine. I gather that from seeing the preening star leave his group and head towards my friend who's still kneeling in the mud. I didn't know that Mikael Jacobsen knew my half-brother. I go closer to hear what he has to say, but stand a little further off, partially hidden behind a row of bushes.

— Nice camera! he says. What brand is it?

Flustered, Antoine sits up straight. Mikael casually takes the camera and asks:

— May I borrow it? I'll give it back, *uh* ... one day.

Without waiting for an answer, he walks off with the thing.

Antoine opens his mouth to say something, but Victor Lavictoire, who had followed Mikael, puts one of his huge feet on Antoine's skinny chest.

— Yo, little Viet, you just do what you're told and keep your mouth shut.



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Antoine freezes. Victor leaves to join Mikael in the crowd. The few students close enough to the picnic tables to have witnessed the scene look away. In any case, who would dare stand up to the big boss of Grade 7? There are of course a few teachers patrolling the school grounds, but even a moron like Mikael-No-Brain-Cell isn't dumb enough to do anything in front of them.

The first bell rings. I join my friend while the others gather around the doors to go get their books.

— He's a *jerk*! I say.

Antoine says nothing. Tears are welling in his eyes, but I pretend not to notice. I give him a friendly punch on the arm.

— We'll go talk to the principal and ...

— And make it even worse, Antoine says. His voice is soft and low. He's whispering to avoid bursting into tears.

— It doesn't matter, he continues. It's just a gadget.

A gadget worth hundreds of dollars that he'd got for his birthday this summer.



# Mikael No-Brain-Cell

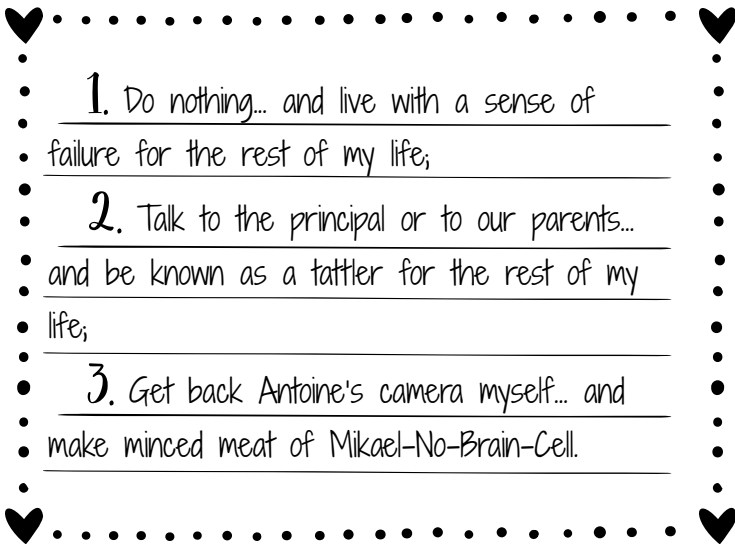
— We should still go talk to the principal, I insist.  
Antoine shakes his head.

— He told me he'd give it back.

Actually, what Mikael had said was that he'd give it back one day, which most probably means never, but I think this to myself.

— In the meantime, Antoine adds, I can just borrow one from school for my class.

His resignation makes me realize that nobody has ever stood up to the **M&M** twins. We enter the school in silence. Lost in my thoughts, I weigh the different options before me:

- 
1. Do nothing... and live with a sense of failure for the rest of my life;
  2. Talk to the principal or to our parents... and be known as a tattler for the rest of my life;
  3. Get back Antoine's camera myself... and make minced meat of Mikael-No-Brain-Cell.

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I went with the third option, although without the minced meat part.





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My name is *Rosalie* and I have a *superpower*: I'm invisible. Seriously! Stick me in the corner of a crowded schoolyard and I guarantee nobody will see me.

At school, Maelia-the-Barbie-Doll and Mikael-No-Brain-Cell reign over the students. When the M+M twins' gang jumps Antoine, Rosalie's half-brother, they cross the line! Rosalie decides to *infiltrate* the gang. Who knows, maybe in becoming *Rosalie Turner*, a beautiful, funny and dynamic girl, Rosalie Noel may begin to exist.

