

Confessions of Daisy and Margo

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She's the girl who got a date to every homecoming dance. Well, the first three. The last dance is still up for grabs. Some lucky guy will ask her, and she'll always say yes (even though she said she has to "think about it." She used it all three times. I guess it worked). She picked me last year, but I won't ask again. She's intimidating—somehow. All the guys in our friend group have had crushes on her. Her scope is bigger than our nerd group though. She's shot down an athlete or two and even the band kids. No clique or stereotype can escape those killer blue-grey eyes.

She walks the halls of Living Hope High School very single and very independent. And me? I'm the awkward friend she's known since the 3rd grade. I'm the awkward friend who wishes she liked me back. I took her to homecoming and visited her at work. I didn't have to tell her my feelings though, right? Couldn't she tell by the way I joked around with her? Lyle thinks she believes she's too good for us nerds. I don't know. All I know is the friend zone is a dark, scary place.

Anyway, she's cute and short. That girl is always happy—smiling, laughing, and joking around. I don't think there's a serious bone in her body. Her obsession with cats is hilarious, and she also runs track. It's freaking awesome to see her at practice five days a week and at track meets. And she plays video games. Basically an angel.

Oh, her name is Melissa.

The blaring school bell ended my daydreams of Melissa. I was being pushed along the hallway, a stampede of tardy students shoving me right into my Anatomy class. Here we go again.

"Please, class. Stop your talking, okay? Class has begun. Sit down now. Okay?" requested Mrs. Royal in her quiet, one tone voice. She only sounded different when she talked about her cats. I like cats, but she made me not want to. Her lessons always included her cats. Or her grandson. Yes, we know he has a blood disease, and we feel bad.

"Lucas Garrett," droned Mrs. Royal.

"Here," I mumbled, already feeling my eyes getting droopy.

Mrs. Royal continued calling roll, her monotone already putting our class to sleep. I felt my eyes closing. My mind was getting itself ready for a long, long hour of her chirping about cells and mitochondria (the powerhouse of the cell. I learned something in that class). But I was determined to stay awake, so I looked at the homework board:

Reproduction system crossword

Read pages 69-80 due tomorrow

I rolled my eyes, trying not to laugh. Mrs. Royal teaching the reproduction system? It would probably be the most awkward thing in the world. It was. The rocket sperm animation on the PowerPoint presentation was enough for me. I doodled and glanced back at Melissa, hoping to catch her looking at me. But she wasn't looking at me. Actually, the seat was empty. She wasn't one to skip class, and she was at lunch earlier.

"Make sure to read pages 69-80 and do the crossword. It is due tomorrow, okay-" began Mrs. Royal.

"Bingo," cried a student from the back of the room. Mrs. Royal Bingo. Even Mrs. Royal knew about it. She looked upset while those who were awake laughed.

Before she could say another word, the bell signaled freedom. The rest of the Anatomy students woke up, and everyone shuffled to their next class. But I was on a mission. Melissa would be in the Pre-calc room, but her seat was empty again. I crossed the hall into Bible class instead. Did she go home sick?

Roll call flew by, and Mr. Knight was trying to lecture. The guys in the room were loud and



didn't care about what Mr. Knight said. I didn't really either. I thought about her again. Melissa had been at lunch and seemed fine, laughing and joking and—

"Lucas," called Mr. Knight across the room.

"Uhh, yes?"

"For the second time, what is the answer?"

"Jesus." Jesus was always the answer.

"No. Satan is the answer. Pay attention. Do you even have your book?"

I glanced down at my desk. I forgot it in my quest to find Melissa. "No, Sir."

"Go get it. Now."

I decided to take the hallway that led to the east stairwell. The east stairwell was forbidden because of hormonal teenagers in a private school; even frontal hugs were illegal. I felt rebellious after he called me out in class I guess. The stairwell was surprisingly empty. It ended at a door that opened to a hallway that went either to the boys' locker room, the gym, or the stage. Small private school problems—the theater stage is in the gym.

As I passed the stage, a crying sound stopped me. I wanted to keep going, but I was curious. Who would be crying on the stage? I looked in and the darkness was inhaling, exhaling. I'd been in haunted houses before so it didn't scare me. I got out my phone instead, another rebellious act. The light showed a figure sitting against a door on wheels. The girl's shaking knees were brought to her chest. Her head rested there. Breaths came in harsh, uneven bursts like she was running a race. Her hands held a light-blue hoodie, her fingers moving across the fabric. She glanced up, an animal in head lights, her inky mascara all over her reddish eyes.

It was Melissa.

"Are you okay?" was all I could ask even though I knew she wasn't. She held up a finger. I didn't think she could talk. Her breathing was still so fast.

I don't know how to deal with crying girls. I felt uncomfortable, wondering if I should leave. Maybe that's what she wanted. But she was my friend, and I liked her. So I sat next to her, leaving six inches for Jesus. I turned off my phone so it was just the darkness, a crying Melissa, and the dependable friend. I always imagined being alone with her. Just not on a stage at school.

Her breathing began to slow down. I checked the time. It had been five minutes. How long had she been there?

"I'm sorry," whispered a voice beside me. I didn't recognize it. It was hoarse and husky. I tried to answer, but the words just got lost. Maybe it didn't help that it was still pitch black. And that Melissa was crying and sitting next to me on the school stage.

"I was at the nurse's office for a stomach ache and I just...this happened on the way back."

"..."

"If you're not gonna say anything, I would rather be alone. I feel like a freak."

"No. I just didn't know what to say," I answered lamely.

"I get it. No one wants to be around a sad person." She sniffled as if to get her point across.

"No. I didn't know about, uhh...this."

Why couldn't I say things right? Here my friend was having a panic attack, and I didn't know what to say. I had seen these before today. I guess I was still in shock. Shock that Melissa was having a panic attack. She seemed so happy all the time. But this made her so...normal. Just like every other high schooler. She was like everyone else.

There was an awkward silence. I tried again. "I'm the one who should be sorry. I had no idea that you had these." I still couldn't say the words because it didn't fit her. Panic attacks didn't equal Melissa. "How long has this been going on?" That was a safe way to ask.

"Maybe two years. I only get them sometimes."

"Well, I'm sorry."



“Don’t be.”

“Why?”

“I haven’t told anyone. You’re the first to find out.”

“I should have known.”

Melissa laughed. It sounded weird. There was no humor or joy in it. “No. You shouldn’t have known. I’m an actor. I’ve played happy my entire life. I think I accidently convinced people that’s all I could be. I’m just a darn great actor is all.”

Acting. She was in the school plays. I suddenly remembered.

“And I fell for it.”

“Sorry, but I wanted you to. No one wants to be around a sad person.”

“Is that why you don’t have a boyfriend?” Darn it. The words slipped out. I’m glad it was dark because I’m sure my face was super red. But this was my chance to convince her. This was important, even if it was a jump in topics.

Another laugh.

“Well, no one likes me.”

“That’s a freaking lie!” Because I like you.

“Has any guy—well, besides Eric, but whatever—ever told me that he liked me?”

But I bought you a milkshake! Doesn’t that count for...

“I can’t read people’s intentions. Most everything seems like a friendly gesture is all.”

Oh.

“So, I always talk myself out of the idea of someone liking me.”

“Are you kidding? Every guy in our friend group—including me—has had a kind of crush on you.”

There was a pause. “Oh,” was all she said.

“And you’ve had a date to every homecoming.”

“True. But I wasn’t dating any of them. We were friends.”

“Friends that liked you.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. Oh. Why can’t you see that?”

“Because I’m me.”

“What does that even mean?”

“You saw a glimpse of that a few minutes ago.”

“You were sad? So what?”

“No one wants to be around a sad person.”

“Are you always this dramatic?”

“Sorry, but yes.”

I had blown it. My chances with Melissa had just crashed and burned. I was her friend, but didn’t know she struggled with this. How had I missed the absences? I missed her teary-eyes and the weird anxious tics, like the way she was running her fingers on that hoodie. She could actually be serious, too. It was a strange day.

She broke the silence again. “What do you know about me?”

Random, but I could do this. “You like to act.”

“I actually hate speaking in front of people. I have major stage fright. So, you’re sort of right. But not really. Try again.”

“Well, you run track.”

.... “Eric got me into it. I started running because he was in track. But I like it now. Keeps me in shape even if I’m bad at it.”

“Okay. One more. You’re super independent—”



“Because I’m afraid of commitment and vulnerability.”

“Wow.”

“Wow indeed. People know about me, but they don’t know me.”

“Why are you saying all of this?”

“I’m just thinking out loud. Hear me out.”

“Okay.”

“Do we even know each other? People only know me for what I do. Does anyone truly know anyone else? Everyone is so superficial. There are just actors and idolaters. People believe what they want about others. They paint this flowery existence around someone, turning them in to some sort of idol. It’s selfish. Humans are humans, and you can’t treat someone like that just to suit your idea of him or her.”

“Dang. That was deep.” So no one really knows her? That’s what she was saying. I think.

“Sorry. I read a lot. Two of my favorite books discuss this topic. These two characters are practically objectified to suit what another character wants them to be. And sorry. I can go on tangents...” I later learned these two books were called *The Great Gatsby* and *Paper Towns*. I had asked her girl friends about the books she liked. It’s weird that she used characters in books to describe her feelings...

I wasn’t mad. “Stop apologizing.”

“Sorry. I do that a lot.”

“I know that...well, I know that now.” That got a laugh out of her. Score.

“But I do the same thing. I mean, I’ve known you since the 3rd grade, but do I really know you? I don’t even know your favorite color!”

“Favorite color?”

“It’s important.”

“Blue.”

“Got it. Mine’s purple. Anything else I should know?”

“I had a girlfriend freshman year.” I felt a light punch on my shoulder. This was the Melissa I was used to seeing.

“No way! I had no clue!”

“Well, she went to a different school. It’s over now, obviously.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Stop that.”

“You were saying?”

“I had a girlfriend my freshman year and my mom has cancer—“

“Stop. What?”

“My mom has cancer.”

Melissa sniffled. “I had no idea. I feel awful.” At least she was sincere.

“Don’t. I haven’t told anyone. It’s her thyroid. She’s doing alright.”

“I’m sor—“

“Don’t.”

“Okay. One more thing?”

“I’m going to college to study computers. Computer science. It’s the nerd in me.”

“That’s so cool! You can help me with all my technology issues.”

I laughed. “You can’t use me for my knowledge. Anyway, can I ask you a less deep question?” She was being so open...

“Shoot.”

“Did you even enjoy homecoming last year? I heard you saying you don’t remember it.”

“It was the best one yet! I said that since it was such a freaking blur. Time flies when you’re



having fun.”

I thought I had ruined her night somehow. Well, I felt better about that. Maybe I would ask her to this next dance.

She sighed. “I wish people were more open like this. You know, talk about the difficult stuff.”

“Today was a step in the right direction.”

“True.”

“Maybe we can have more talks like this. Keep getting to know each other.” I sounded so lame. She didn’t seem to care.

“I’ll try. Oh, and one more thing.”

“What’s that?” Please tell me you like me. Please tell me you like me. Confess your undying love for me.

“Don’t act like a victim.” And she was back to the dramatic, serious Melissa. Well, I guess she was just being herself. I needed some time to accept it.

“Uhh...what?”

“A victim. The whole friend zone b.s. that I hear all the guys talk about. You can’t force someone to like you and blame them for friend-zoning you. The right person will return the feelings. Don’t act like a victim.”

“Will do, Pal.” I had been caught.

“Thanks, Bud. Now, give me a quick hug and get to class, you rebel.” Just like that, she was back to normal Melissa. Or the normal I thought her to be. This was confusing. But I understood what she had said. No one really knows her.

I expected an awkward side-hug, the usual. Nope. Both her arms were around me. Her head barely reached my chest. A friendly hug, but better than nothing. I hugged her back, wishing it would last longer. But that darn bell rang, and she stopped hugging me. I had missed the rest of class and hugging was considered PDA (a.k.a. sinful). I was becoming a rebel for this girl.

“See you after school. Maybe we all could go to McDonald’s or Sonic for some food. You know, the usual.” She wiped her eyes with her jacket and bounced off to her next class like she hadn’t had a panic attack. The actor thing to do.

I watched her go and wondered if things would be different between us. So much had happened, but nothing happened at all. We just had a conversation. But there was something about that day I wouldn’t forget. I wouldn’t forget sitting with Melissa on the dark stage as we talked about our lives in a way that wasn’t fake. It was rebellious. It was nice.

Things went back to normal after that day—Melissa the actor, I the awkward friend-zoned friend, and the other guys all “idolaters.” I began to like her less. Don’t get me wrong. I still cared about her a lot. Just not in the same way. More like a friend way. The other guys still talked so highly of her, but I knew better. I knew the truth. I bet they didn’t notice her sad eyes that she hid behind smiles and laughs or her nervous ticks. It was like our little secret.

But that’s okay. Maybe one day she will learn to open up and stop acting all the time.

By the way, Melissa went to her senior homecoming that year dressed as the Disney Princess Belle. She also went alone.

