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High-Stakes Drama, for the Bargain Price of Fifty Dollars

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The party at Madison Whiteman's sprawling lakeside house on Lake Sue was sick. Madison was sort of top-tier popular, in that so-called "popular" crowd that everyone kind of dislikes. You know who I'm talking about.

Since Madison's a bit of a MySpaceSlut (and not the brightest bulb in the hardware store), when she posted a bulletin with an announcement of her party, a couple hundred of her closest "Friends" showed up. But the beer would never run out—when one keg emptied, money got passed around, jobs were delegated, older friends or siblings were summoned, and another would show up.

After I'd seen the announcement for the party, I'd checked out the comments on her page, just for shits and giggles. It was so discouraging. Reading all the horrendously misspelled "words"

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and nonexistent punctuation was like witnessing the slow and painful death of the English language. Some choice gems were:

omfg Mad you look sooooooo prettiii in thos pixxx. im so therr on fri.

sorri I 4got2callu yesterdayyy but ill c u at the partyyyyy!!!!!!

omg saturday! idk if I work or not but ill call u lol hehehehe. hope we can hangout work is so gayyyyy! NE1 fill u in on my latest DRAMA yet?

Ugh. You know, I usually don't have a problem with most people, but sometimes people can be so gayyyy. Know what I mean?

As our driver pulled up to the house, I noticed the whole street was lined with cars: shit-ass Camrys from the nineties, shining new Beemers, Mercedes SUVs, Volvo station wagons—a pretty mixed Winter Park crowd. Cars were covering Madison's sprawling front yard, too, and as we got out of the Town Car, Lucas was downing his second bottle of Sprite and Grey Goose (luckily Mitsy had recently restocked). He'd made the switch from tequila to vodka after the first batch of margs. Not really the *smartest* idea—especially since we'd started so early—but he wasn't gonna listen to reason tonight, I didn't think.

“Easy there, killer,” I told him as we got out of the car.

“Pish-posh, Madgie,” he responded, arching an eyebrow in a dead-on impersonation of his über-proper Waspy mother. “It's a fucking *party!*”

Lucas had definitely pulled out all the stops for tonight, his

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I'm-a-Slut-Now Debutante Ball of sorts. He was compulsively squeezable in his skinny-leg Levi's, and his skintight faux-vintage David Bowie shirt definitely showed off the little guns he'd been working on lately. (He was also sporting his favorite pair of pink Hello Kitty socks I'd given him as a joke for his eighteenth birthday, but inside his favorite pair of Marc Jacobs sneakers.)

I wasn't looking so bad myself. I was in my worship-my-booty Seven jeans, silver pumps that were surprisingly (and blessedly) easy to squeeze into and walk in, and my amazing new blouse—my sister Vanessa's latest creation. It was a three-quarter-length-sleeved black silk blouse with the ends of the sleeves slit in two places to make them burst open. The slits were studded with tiny silver ball bearings, and the rest of the blouse had all these random, swirling lines made of metallic silver thread. The deep neckline, which pretty much exploded open at the chest (always gotta show off the breasteses, baby), was lined with these amazing silver-and-lime-green paisley embellishments. I know it all sounds kind of showy, but . . . well, fuck yeah, of *course* it is! I wanted to *marry* this blouse.

Vanessa works at a bank in the big shopping center next to her apartment. She never went to college—never really wanted to—but she does pretty well . . . even if she regrets her decision sometimes (especially when our mom rubs her face in it on a weekly basis). Her big dream is to maybe go to fashion school, and eventually have a clothing boutique somewhere, where she can sell the *delicious* clothes she makes—for people of *all* sizes. She totally

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deserves it, too—I only wish she could get out of that awful dead-end job to make it all work.

Vanessa's sort of my hero, because:

a) If she didn't make these plus-size masterpieces out of silk, satin, faux-fur, feathers, and elastic for me, I'd be doomed to an eternity of shopping at Gap and Old Navy and the Dress Barn,

b) Um . . . well . . . she does it for free (for me, at least!), and

c) Even if she's a little behind, she's still trying to follow her dream, despite the soul-sucking lectures from our mother.

Lucas tripped over himself as soon as we stepped onto Madison's grassy front lawn.

"Shit!" I laughed as I took him by the arm. "Hey, let's make *water* our first drink."

"Fuck water. Moderation is best *in moderation!*" Lucas cried semi-maniacally, and took off running for the front door.

I'm a big girl, and Lucas is way faster than me—and I wasn't in the mood to run an obstacle course, like Lucas obviously was—so I just weaved my way slowly through the mess of cars covering the yard to the front porch . . . or *portico*, rather. (Gotta love gaudy Greek columns in suburban Orlando.) When I finally opened the door and headed into the party, I heard someone call, "What's good, Rita, you lookin' *fine* tonight!" from the side of the house.

"Hey, Alejandro, *gracias*, baby," I purred, heading into the house. *God*, that boy was hot. This blouse was already paying off.

The party was like a cross section of our school. There were my Gs (as in *Wuddup*, *G?*) and my Gs (as in the Lucas variety);

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my Puerto Rican countrymen drooling over my *fine behind*; all the bored-looking, skinny, pseudo-intellectual hipster kids (why even *go* to a keg party?); overenthusiastic athletes; stoner-chill skater/surfer/beach-bum kids; the way-diverse group of computer geeks; even some kids from the drama department. Pretty much everyone was in their own individual cliques, but I went around and said hi to everyone. I sorta had friends all over the place. Everyone *looved* the new blouse, of course. And it was so nice to see everyone in one place outside of school.

Then I saw Bridget Benson chatting it up with Lindsay Taylor, who was voted Most Likely to Marry a Colombian Drug Lord . . . by me and Lucas. Lindsay had been in a show with Bridget waaaaa back when—and hadn't worked since, except maybe a Dr. Scholl's commercial or two. She'd kind of gone the Britney route, only ten years sooner. She was all messy, curly, red-streaked amber hair and skank-ass makeup, and was wearing a way-too-short white skirt (which served up that flat white ass of hers like an order of mashed potatoes), with a baby-doll tee that read HEARTBREAKER. Right. More like I'M COKED UP AND EASY SO COME AND GET IT. Totally hotttt. JK!

Bridget, of course—*May she one day get uncontrollable acne!*—looked predictably perfect.

And while all the lowly plebeians in the house were drinking the same Bud Light keg beer out of red Solo cups, Bridget and Lindsay were taking delicate little sips on red cosmos . . . in martini glasses with sugar-dusted rims, no less!

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Bridget's latest TV role—on a super-successful Saturday-morning tween show produced by a certain Orlando-based mega-company whose name I don't think I need to spell out for you—has set her up to be the next big breakout actress . . . and probably musician, too, eventually, since that's how it goes nowadays. Some really wholesome blah-blah-blah. And up until recently, I'd noticed that she'd been very careful not to drink at parties, probably for fear of being photographed and having her wholesome image called into question by the execs at her family-friendly production company. But I guess she was throwing caution to the wind tonight. Go, Bridget! You *drink* that badass cosmo! Next thing we know, she'll be riding her hog topless at Bike Week!

And here came poor doormat—and our hostess for the evening—Madison Whiteman, with a shiny cocktail shaker full of refills for the exclusive duo.

If *this* wasn't proof to people that Bridget Benson sucked, I don't know what is. Just drink the beer like everyone else, ho!

Whatever. That Bud Light was calling my name now, as was Lucas.

"Beer, Madge!" he called from the keg, which was in the screened-in back pool deck. I headed over to him, squeezing my way through the crowd. When I got up to Bridget and Lindsay, they hardly budged to let me by, so I had to just keep moving.

"Ugh!" Bridget huffed at me. "Watch the cosmo! This blouse is *silk*."

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“So’s mine—’scuse me,” I replied.

This was the most Bridget had said to me in a long time. Most of the time, she couldn’t even look me in the eye. Maybe that had something to do with the fact that right around the time she’d friendship-dumped me, she’d pulled the perfect part in a new TV series *right* out from under my feet.

And then went on to become a superstar.

Well, as much a superstar as an eight-year-old can be.

And please: don’t think she got the part because I’m fat and she’s not and I’m an idiot for thinking I’d have a *chance* at a part that perfect Bridget Benson got. Because for the record, I didn’t start getting chubs till *after* the disastrous audition, when I quit acting and went to normal-kids’ school. And before you go on making *more* assumptions, I didn’t pork up because I was depressed or anything. Acting was hard. I wanted to have *friends* and a more normal existence. And the only reason I got fat is because, well . . . *everyone* on my dad’s side started gaining weight when they were around my age.

Now, as I passed Bridget, I heard her mumble something about sweatshop silkworms working overtime. “Lucasito!” I called now, deciding to ignore whatever Bridget’s witty anti-fat comment was. “How’s that delectable brew?”

“I’m gonna *funnel* it!” he said excitedly as I walked out onto the porch. He pointed to the beer funnel this basketball-player guy Jon was holding.

“All right, Ellison,” Jon said. “Stick your thumb at the end of

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the tube and get ready. I'll pour the beer into the funnel and tell you when the foam's gone."

Funneling, while having the potential to be gross and messy, is a fine method for binge-drinking piss-water beer. It's also a bit of an art form, and it takes some practice. So as I caught Lucas's nearly imperceptible, momentary look of confusion in regards to Jon's directions, I realized that *I* had funneled before, but Lucas hadn't. Before I could interrupt the process to give my friend a few pointers, it was too late. The beer had been poured, the thumb removed, and Bud Light was splattering all over Lucas's face and the back porch.

As Lucas belched and blew foam out his nose, Jon was laughing, saying, "Nice job, Ellison—what the fuck was that, dude?"

"Never send a woman to do a man's job!" another b'ball boy named Tristan laughed.

"Maybe you could give him a few *pointers* on suppressing the *gag* reflex, Tris," I said, burping Lucas like a baby. "Here," I said to my buddy, "watch how it's done. It's actually really simple. You just relax your throat and let the whole beer sort of . . . *fall* into your stomach." I took the tube from him, placed my thumb over the end, and sat in the chair next to the keg. "*Cerveza*, baby!" I yelled at Jon. "*Dame!*"

Jon obeyed, pouring a cupful of beer into the funnel. Once he said the foam was gone, I gave myself a three-second countdown and let the beer rush into my stomach in two seconds *flat!* (New record for me.) I let out a bellowing and very satisfying belch as a finale.

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I smiled graciously, bowing to accept the cheers and applause from the people on the porch.

I summoned Lucas to the funnel. “You ready, *amor?*” I asked him.

“Sure.”

I noticed we had a few more people around us now, notably Bridget and Lindsay.

“Okay,” I said to Lucas. I took the funnel from Jon and gave the end of the tube to Lucas. I slowly poured in a cup of beer, and waited for thirty seconds as the foam worked its way out. For some reason, I was feeling very protective of Lucas right then. Maybe because of his recent heartache, or maybe because I just didn’t like Bridget being so close by—but I *really* didn’t want him to embarrass himself. He was all fun and games now, but I had a feeling he could crack at any moment.

“All right,” I said. “On the count of three. One . . . two . . . *three!*”

Lucas removed his thumb, and at first, I could tell he was a little surprised at what gravity will do to a funnel full of beer, but he recovered quickly, and seriously just *inhaled* that beer. Down the tube it drained, and within five seconds—he’d get better with practice, though Mitsy would probably frown on such a vulgar habit—the beer was all gone and Lucas had his pride back.

“Yes!” he cried, throwing his hands in the air and belching. “I’m a *maaaaaan!*”

I saw Bridget roll her eyes. Grr.

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“Hey, Bridget,” I called to her. “You wanna do a funnel?” I all of a sudden needed to embarrass her. Nobody rolls their eyes at my boy Lucas. “Deeeee-*licious* Bud Liiight . . . !” I coaxed, my voice singsong-y.

“I don’t drink Butt Wipe,” she said, shrugging. “Sorry.”

“Ah, c’mon . . . Whaddya think, people?” I called to everyone around me. “Who thinks our little student-body president should kick off the prom season with a nice funnel of beer?!”

Everyone laughed and cheered in agreement, seemingly eager to see their leader debase herself to domestic keg beer. By now, some more people were hovering on the other side of the sliding-glass door. She’d have to do it.

“You gotta listen to the fans, Bridge,” I goaded.

“Fine,” Bridget said quickly, placing her empty martini glass delicately on the patio table. “If anyone takes pictures of this, you’re *banned* from prom. Seriously.” She turned to Jon and ordered, “*Pour*, please!” and he respectfully poured half a cup of beer into the funnel.

There are really only two words to sum up what happened next:

Beer everywhere!

Okay, maybe two more:

Everyone laughing.

Bridget, looking uncharacteristically mortified, stormed back into the house, nearly running right over a *very* characteristically spaced-out Lindsay.

“That was fun.” Lucas smiled. “Let’s do another!”