

“Would you still be my friend if I was a lesbian?”

It didn't mean anything.

It was a challenge to our friendship; a borderline whine in that infuriatingly demanding tone that only a twelve-year-old can master. It was spoken with my head tipped sideways and a half smirk twisting up my face. I looked calm, collected; as contained as two packets of lollies and three hours of sleep could allow. Even so, my heart couldn't help but stutter a little, tripping over the words.

It didn't mean anything.

I knew that I liked boys, and that was all that there was to it. I could like boys, or I could like girls. I liked boys. I couldn't like girls. It was simple and it was silly. There's a redundancy to hypothetical questions with no evidence to support them. The weighted 'if' that proved that there was no basis for concern. *If* this is not reality, then this is not significant.

It didn't mean anything.

I was leaning against her windowsill in the space between her bed and the wall. There were swirls of brown glitter on her walls and I traced them in my mind. She was perched on the edge of her bed with odd socks and a crinkly frown. Her hair and her duvet were equally crumpled.

It didn't mean anything.

As she took her time thinking I took my time getting annoyed. Best friends forever was not supposed to be conditional. Her eyes were squinted in that way that they always did when she was thinking too hard and couldn't make up her mind. I'm the Libra; I should be the indecisive one.

“Well I mean...”

Her eyebrows pulled together and her mouth twitched up a little, like the whole scenario was hilarious but she was forced to keep a semblance of calm. My stomach was twisting by this point, that little bit of fear creeping up. The roots of my insecurity had been planted even then.

“I guess,”

We could both breathe a little easier then, even though the discomfort was still clear in the twist of her lips and the way she rushed to continue without even taking a break.

“It doesn't matter because you're not.”

She was right. I liked boys. We smiled, we found something new to discuss, something else to entertain us. And we continued. Best friends forever.

It didn't mean anything.

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It was easy to forget the hours spent behind closed eyelids where I lived lives that weren't always girl meets boy. The nights when there was a damsel in distress, locked away in her marble tower, but it wasn't me. I was the warrior princess, destined to save the beautiful maiden from the evil in the world, and she would save me from myself. The nights when there were monsters, and destruction, and my agony would overwhelm me if it wasn't for the strong woman

beside me; someone to love me and remind me that pain was not everything. The nights when I would crave for the things that I didn't have in my life

But I was not awake. I was not in control.

It didn't mean anything.

It was easy to forget how unbiased my appraising gazes were when I was out with friends. When we would be walking down the sidewalk and an elbow would dig into my side; had I seen that boy with the nice hair and the perfect teeth? That's all they would notice. That's all they were looking for. I was lost in the oceans trapped in the eyes of the girl walking the opposite direction, flashes of silver scales and streaks of green and gold; light reflecting off the peaks of waves.

I was just looking.

It didn't mean anything.

Some things were harder to forget: when the girl from down the road started dating the mousy boy from school and jealousy erupted through me. I wasn't jealous over him; I was jealous of him. That was fair, wasn't it? She was perfect. I wanted her to be mine, and I wanted to be hers in return. When my frustration cooled and I crusted over, I was left with a perfect mould of what I had felt. I couldn't erase that. But I could lie, I could twist it; twist myself.

I was jealous. I was jealous of their relationship. I didn't need to specify who I was jealous of.

It didn't mean anything.

I couldn't forget the way the girl sitting next to me in math made my heart flutter. I admired her brain; the way that she could greet any challenge, solve any problem without a single crease gracing her forehead. I admired her smile; the way she kept it hidden behind steel eyes so that every time you drew it out it felt like a victory. I admired her strength; the way she didn't let her anguish surface, never revealing it to be there unless she wanted to, and that meant she trusted you (she trusted me). I admired superficial things too; the soft flesh of her cheeks, the way one eyebrow was almost always pulled up in cynicism, the way her veins mapped the backs of her long slender hands.

I knew that it wasn't just admiration. Denial was the only thing I had left.

It didn't mean anything.

I fell in love with the whites of her eyes as they rode a roller coaster, looping around at something silly I had done, but always with a smile; always with that little hidden smile.

It didn't mean anything.

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"I think he's just saying it for attention."

It didn't mean anything.

It wasn't about what he was saying; these bold new sentiments that he could have both. It was about him. He was too abrasive. He was too temperamental. He was an irritant; poison ivy wrapped around your brain. You just wanted to scratch it off. I didn't like him so I was willing to lie. Who was I lying to?

It didn't mean anything.

He made stuff up all the time. He was an only child, but he was neglected. Not in the sense that he was left at home for days on end with no one supporting him. His parents neglected him while being present. There was always an absence to them; at least to him. He couldn't take it. He needed affection. He needed resentment. He needed acknowledgement. We all knew he would do anything to get it.

It didn't mean anything.

We knew what it meant. We knew it was possible. We knew it might even be probable. But we were living life in a bubble. He was the first to realise there was something outside of it. I should have noticed. I was too busy living life with my eyes closed. You can only stumble blindly in the dark for so long before you fall. I should have noticed. Why wouldn't he mean it? There were easier ways to get himself noticed. We were being ignorant and we were being arrogant. It wasn't about who he was; it was about what he was saying. It's about what we were saying.

I couldn't stomach the truth and I didn't want to taste that lie. It wasn't a lie to her, it was a lie to myself. Even then that denial was my greatest weakness. I had to tell her something. I had to tell myself something.

"Maybe."

It didn't mean anything, did it?

All I could think of as we accused him of falsifying himself were the lyrics to a song, and it twisted me, because it was me. It wasn't him. I was the girl bleeding out on the floor. I wasn't doing it for attention. I wasn't doing it. Pieces of me just kept slipping away regardless.

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"You know we're pretty much dating, right?"

It didn't mean anything.

But it made me happy. It made my stomach tingle when we held eye contact just a little too long; the stare gaining significance as we would just smile, ignorant to the rest of the world. Having her, like that, made me happy. Why wouldn't it? She was amazing. She could make anyone; everyone smile.

It didn't mean anything.

But she'd said it before. After we'd gone out to the park, side by side on the swings. My heart would lift and soar with my body, and I knew it wasn't the height that made me dizzy. After we'd

spent the day curled up on her couch with a tub of ice cream because something, anything, had gone wrong. The comfort of our limbs pressed together, a physical anchor. She'd probably say it again.

It didn't mean anything.

But there was a definite basis of it. We'd go out together. She'd buy me a meal, or I would buy one for her, even though neither of us could really afford it. She'd let me borrow her clothes and I'd let her borrow mine. Sometimes we'd just never give them back and that was okay. We'd go for walks; get lost and explore the world, ourselves, each other. We'd sing off key duets and we'd talk without words.

We'd walk the whole way home holding hands and she'd drop me off at my front door. Sometimes we held hands just to piss people off, when we knew they were scrutinising us. We would revel in their condescending glances and the way they would stop speaking when we were within earshot. They were a joke to us. Sometimes we held hands when there was no one there to see, simply because I liked the way that hers felt in mine. I liked how it felt when we were linked; how she was warm and soft and comforting when I leaned my head on her shoulder to close my eyes for just a moment of peace. How she felt safe. And it wasn't like I didn't know that I could, not anymore. It wasn't that I couldn't like her because she's a girl and so am I. It wasn't I couldn't like her because she's straight and I'm straight and it just won't work. There was nothing stopping me; us. It wasn't even that I didn't like her. It wasn't anything.

It meant something.

"Pretty much."

A pause; a breath. There would be consequences if I continued. I had to continue.

"Do you want to? Like, for real?"

She smiled and nodded. Her nose crinkled as she smiled and her teeth showed; without the manufactured straightness that my own possessed. A wave of pink flushed through the constellations of her freckles and her eyes were like a forest in winter, sparkling and mystical; or a warm cup of cocoa in front of the fire, sweet and warm, and she was breath-taking.

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It was easier than I thought, in the end.

I had always been afraid of telling her. I couldn't help it. I didn't want her to destroy all those years of pinky swears and knuckle promises. She was my best friend, but a part of me, this part of me, couldn't trust her. I didn't know her when it came to this. I had never understood her. We had agreed to disagree, and swept all those conversations into the back of the closet.

But here I was, covered in dust and cobwebs, ready to reveal myself.

We weren't twelve anymore. We had grown and we had evolved. We had changed and this had changed.

She found us holding hands. I say she found us, but really, we were seeking her out. Our action was in our exposure. It was an invitation to the conversation; if she was ready to hear it. The holding hands wasn't unusual, not for us. It was the accompanying kiss, shy smiles pressed together.

We had the conversation. It was okay. She was surprised, and maybe she didn't understand, but she accepted. That was all that mattered to me.

After all, we were sisters. We hadn't been raised together, and our genetics would deny it, but we were sisters. We had grown separate and together.

Everything would be okay. I could have my best friend; my sister, and I could have the woman I loved. There was no ultimatum. There was no me or her; no friend or lover. There was no girls or boys. Things would be different, but different would be good.

Everything would be okay.

It meant something.