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## The Pink Bermuda Triangle

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I hate Bridget Benson. I know “hate” is a strong word to use, but she leaves me no choice. It’s gone too far. Some other strong words I’d use to describe her would be: conniving bitch, evil manipulator, non-benevolent dictator, shallow label whore, hateful Wasp, horrible actress on-screen (but amazing off-screen, ironically), and . . . and . . . two-faced bastard child of a Tijuana whore!

Hey, I usually don’t hate people. I *love* people! And I love myself. I love my big ol’ body and I love who I am—and people respond to that accordingly, which has given me a life full of amazing, astounding, and all-around awesome friends. I might have even been *friends* with Bridget Benson—if I didn’t want to expose her bullshit in all its stinky awfulness to the misinformed student body.

Okay, truth be told, I *used* to be friends with Bridget. Back when

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we were six years old, we were child actors in a couple of kids' shows that filmed here in Orlando. I don't know how it happened, since we were on *different* shows, but I guess our parents must've met at some event or something, because all of a sudden, *boom!* we're play-mates. At that point, I had a tutor, so no school for me—so Bridget was pretty much my best and only friend. At six, I guess it's hard to be a raving, uppity biotch, because we got along pretty well for a couple years . . . till Bridget stopped calling me all of a sudden.

Ugh. Bridget Benson.

She plays the angel on TV and at school, but people should know about the *real* Bridget Benson. The Bridget Benson who embarrassed me on national television when we were sixteen. Who had the nerve to call me a “fat piece of Puerto Rican trash.” Who acts all friend-of-the-environment but drives a gas-guzzling SUV and litters like it's going out of style faster than trucker hats did *oh-so-long* ago. Who violates the dignity of heart attack victims! Who thinks that everyone we know can be bought off—because she has the money to do it. . . . Really, the only thing she *hasn't* done is kill puppies and kittens and sell the skins to Chinese black-market fur traders!

It wasn't always like this. There was a time, just a few weeks ago, when hearing Bridget's name did hardly anything to me. But that was before my life was turned into this huge, messy *telenovela* (minus all the slapping) with unpleasant surprises lurking around every corner.

So! Welcome to the fucked-up, crazy story of how Bridget

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Benson turned mild-mannered me into a hateful rage-o-maniac hell-bent on changing the face of “prom queen” forever!! (Yes, that was a DOUBLE exclamation point!!)

A few weeks before I left my sanity at coat check, I was driving in my car and *basking* in the luxurious love I was experiencing for the brand-new blouse my sister had just made for me, when my best friend and right-hand homo, Lucas Ellison, had called me on my cell and frantically told me through choked sobs and violent sniffles that he and Zach, his boyfriend of a year—more than 365 consecutive days, babes—had just broken up, and that I needed to get to his penthouse condo, “like, stat.”

Twenty minutes and a few run-through red lights later, I was in his bedroom, doing my best to comfort him. I could not *stand* to see my poor dear Lucas crying his little blue eyes out. In fact, seeing my adorable friend’s baby face streaked with tears and smeared with hysteri-snot made *me* want to cry.

“What happened?” I asked.

“He’s just— I mean, he— Oh, goddammit!” He broke down again and put his face in his hands and continued to cry.

“Lucas, sweetie,” I cooed, handing him a paper bag, “just breathe into this and tell me what’s up.”

Without even looking up, he took the bag from me and breathed in deeply . . . then started coughing. “Did I just breathe in eau de Burger King?” he asked, then looked at the bag I’d handed him, answering his own question.

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“I was finishing my fries on the elevator ride up. Sorry—I wanted to get here as soon as I could.”

“You mean after you docked at The Mothership.” (This is what he’s taken to calling The King.)

“Bitch, I was boxed in at the drive-through line when you called—gimme *some* credit.”

“Zach and I fought about prom again.” From the way Lucas blurted it out, then immediately welled up, I could tell this wasn’t about his desire to wear a wrist corsage. This was not a Crying During *Grey’s Anatomy*-type thing—Lucas had truly blown a gasket.

I pointed to the Burger King bag, and Lucas nodded and resumed his breathing.

“This is kinda yummy, actually,” he added meekly. “Guess you got onion rings, too?”

Zach is (or *was*, I guess) Lucas’s boyfriend. They’d stayed together this whole school year, even though they were no longer at the same school. See, Lucas had transferred to Winter Park just this—our *senior!*—year, during which we’d become superfast, supertight friends.

“Madge, *why* did I have to date a closet case for this long?” Lucas wailed. “I *knew* it would get old!”

Madge is me. Well, actually Margarita Antonia Diaz is me. “Madge” was born in Spanish class with Lucas. (Yes, I’m Puerto Rican and I take Spanish, and *besa mi culo*, baby, because it’s an easy A.) So one day we did this exercise to learn about the different forms of traditional Spanish names. I’m Margarita Antonia Diaz normally,

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but if you added my mom's maiden name, I'd be Margarita Antonia Diaz-Gallegos. Then Lucas and I figured out that if we got married, I'd be Margarita Antonia Diaz-Gallegos de Ellison—and thus, “M.A.D.G.E.” was born. Lucas, Madonna-crazed homosexual that he is, immediately started calling me “Madge” exclusively (except for when he called me “Your Madgesty”), which I wasn't all that crazy about at first, but when that adorable little blond angel had said all melancholically, “But, Margarita, you might be the only Madge I'll ever get,” I couldn't help but grin and bear it.

“Why don't you tell me what the fight was about?” I said, as soothingly as I could.

“Well, you know, prom's coming up,” he said, calming down a bit.

Prom *was* coming up. My health-nut freak show of a mother—in the grand old PR tradition—was insisting on making my dress for me, and since she paid the bills (actually, she just signed the checks; my often-absent workaholic father made the money), I'd pretty much resigned myself to it. So long as there weren't bows or sashes or ruffles on the thing . . . unless, of course, they were made out of vinyl or faux fur.

“And remember how you told me I shouldn't be afraid to ask Zach to prom and that we should totally go together?” Lucas asked. “Well, I *agreed* with you. And Zach's my fucking *boyfriend!* My boyfriend of *forever*. So I asked him. And you know what happened?”

“He didn't wanna go.”

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“Give the lady a prize! You guessed it—he *still* hasn’t come out to his parents, and he’s ‘not comfortable being gay in public’! What the hell?! I couldn’t *take* it anymore!”

“Gay in public” was sort of Lucas’s specialty. He’d been out since ninth grade, and frankly I’m surprised he and Zach lasted so long. Not that I didn’t like Zach. I actually *really* liked Zach—he was the sweet, chill ying to Lucas’s flamboyant and manic *yang!yang!yang!* Which I thought would ultimately be enough to win Lucas over and make him be more patient with Zach—because everyone deserves to come out on their own terms. But I guess Lucas’s impatience had won out. Sucks for Zach.

“So then,” he went on, “it escalated into this big fight, and he was saying that prom isn’t such a big deal—which I said of course it *is* and that *you* and *everyone else in the world* agreed with me—and before I knew it, Zach is *screaming* at me, telling me he could take the pressure from me *no longer*, and that it’d just be better if we weren’t *together* anymore.” Now the tears started back up again, and back to the BK bag Lucas went.

Shit. I guess Lucas had been the dumpee, not the dumper. No *wonder* he was freaking out so much. I guess I should’ve guessed it from his hysterical condition, but this whole time I figured he’d been the one to get fed up with Zach. Though not to sound mean, but it seemed like Lucas might’ve instigated the breakup, even if he didn’t perform the follow-through. I’d only meant Lucas should *ask* Zach to prom—not freak out and get into a huge blowout over it. It wasn’t worth that.

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But I kept doing my best to ease Lucas's pain—back-rubbing, hand-holding, shoulder-to-cry-on . . . the whole bit. When Lucas wanted to trash-talk his “venomous,” and “straitlaced” ex, I would nod and agree. When he wanted to reminisce, I would happily join in. I heard the story of their first date, when Lucas was made to pretend that he and Zach were going on a double date with two girls from their chemistry class, and how mad it'd made him—but how once they were out of sight of Zach's house, Zach reached over and took Lucas's hand oh-so-sweetly. I told him I liked how Zach had an insane capacity for geography trivia, and that I'd found it way interesting that South Africa had three capital cities: one for judiciary, one for legislative, and one for administrative.

It was almost like having a eulogy for their relationship (except for the trash-talking part, of course). This seemed to help Lucas a little bit.

Eventually, we ended up leaning our faces against Lucas's floor-to-ceiling windows, gazing onto downtown Orlando. We wound up here often . . . people-watching at Lake Eola from four hundred feet in the air. Everything just seemed so tranquil from up here—and it was our favorite activity to do together at his house. (Well, other than making chocolate-covered, frozen-whipped-cream-and-graham-cracker sandwiches, and watching *Arrested Development* DVDs . . .)

“You know what?” Lucas said, staring down onto the city. “I've spent the last year of my life dealing with someone else's gay hang-ups. Maybe I should look at this as an opportunity.”

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“An opportunity for what?”

“Well, first of all, you and I should *totally* go to prom together now. Wait.” He smiled and backed away from the window, then knelt down on one knee. “No-Salt-on-My-Margarita Diaz, will you go to the prom with me?”

I smiled big and said, “Of course.” I hadn’t had a boyfriend since the fall—long-distance shit with college guys just isn’t my thing, I guess—and the only real crush I’d had as of late was on the scrumptious BK drive-through guy (Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays), so I’d been planning on going stag. But having a cute little blond boy on my arm—even though I’d probably tower a few inches over him in my heels—wouldn’t be *such* a bad thing.

“Good!” Lucas beamed, standing back up to give me a big hug. Then he continued, “Anyway . . . *other* good things about this breakup. Now that I’m a free man, I get to play the field again!”

“Lucas, I don’t think you’ve *ever* really played the field . . . even metaphorically.”

“Exactly! Now’s my chance to slut it up!”

“Oh.” *This* caught me off guard. “Seriously?”

“Yeah!” He looked off into the distance, as if staring into a future of sexual encounters with every available eighteen-year-old gay boy in metro Orlando. He had quite the cat-grin going on. “Oh, Madge . . . let’s celebrate! Let’s go to Parliament House!”

“No! We’ve got Madison Whiteman’s party tonight.” (Plus, I wasn’t in the mood for the trashy sights that the Parliament House Motor Inn club-slash-motel had to offer, as hilariously divine as

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they could be at times.) “Don’t you wanna see Madison get treated like shit by Bridget Benson like always?” I asked.

Poor Madison. She used to be the school’s Top Dog, till Top Bitch (*f’sho!*) Bridget Benson came onto the scene in fall of sophomore year, the year we turned sixteen. Bridget had been home-schooled and tutored through most of elementary and middle school, but once she hit high school, her “momager” and publicist thought it’d be a good idea for her to film only during summers and holidays, so she could slum it in the public school system. Winter Park High, the area’s highest-rated institution (and the overall poshest school district), was the natural choice.

Miss Madison Whiteman’s fall from the top of the cheerleading pyramid came rapidly, and can be explained only by a minor drug scandal that I’m pretty sure Bridget (or the previously mentioned momager or publicist) coordinated single-handedly. Why Bridge and Mad were such good “friends” now, I didn’t really know, but maybe there’s some truth in the adage “keep your friends close and your enemies closer.”

As for me, Bridget was hardly an *enemy* at this point. Except for the fact that years ago, she had dropped me as hard as a coke-hungry starlet drops rehab—and, of course, there was the *Super Sweet 16* incident—I was pretty much neutral on her. Since she came back into my school and my life two years ago, we’d hardly spoken outside of the few cold and uncomfortable social exchanges in the classes we shared—and that was just fine by me. Hey, at this point, I didn’t *need* any more friends—pretty much

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everyone at school loved me, so what difference would it make to have one more? Especially one who I was pretty sure harbored some mysterious resentment toward me. I mean, why *else* would someone stop talking to me? I was like *Super* Friend!

But a lot of people loved Bridget. And—I *guess*—what’s not to love? Money and fame; impossibly bright and shiny smile; blonde-highlighted-to-perfection shimmery hair; a rock-star body that would get her hired for a WB show (I’m sure she was holding out for a guest appearance at some point); “friend of the people” as student-body president; hot item, everyone-wants-him boyfriend . . . the works.

(Okay, let’s go ahead and add a side of “mild distaste” to my previous order of “neutral.” I ain’t gonna lie. She did sometimes get to me.)

Lucas laughed. “Benson and Whiteman, together forever . . . Okay, okay, we’ll go to the party. I’m sure I can find guys there . . .”

I gave a little half nod/half smile. I gotta say, I wasn’t too sure about this new Lucas. I’d only known him one way—attached and in love—and I wondered if things were gonna drastically change now . . .

“Wanna have a drink, hoochie?!” Lucas asked suddenly, his smile widening mischievously.

Okay, I guess things were pretty much the same so far.

“It’s kinda early, isn’t it?” I asked.

“You were gonna come over and pre-party tonight anyway,” he said. “So why *not* start early? It’s a special occasion! I’ll make mango margarit—”

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“Sold!” I yelled, smiling.

Maybe it was because it was my namesake drink, or maybe it was just because Lucas’s are always so fruity and delicious (“Just like me,” he always says), but I can never say no to a mango margarita.

“Comin’ up!” he said giddily, and skipped down the stairs and to the foyer.

Lucas’s mom, who insists on being called “Mitsy” (and I love it—love it—love it), keeps a supply of mini liquor bottles in a pink magazine basket by the front door. She used to keep a closer eye on her liquor supply, but since Lucas and I only had a few weeks left of high school and had already each gotten full rides to University of Florida (Go, Gators!), she’d put out the basket as a sort of reward.

Her one rule was that we—really, *truly*—had to keep an eye on each other.

Oh, and that we take her car service, which always makes for a pretty fabulous entrance . . .

. . . and that if there was only one bottle of Grey Goose left, we were to leave it precisely where it was.

(I *heart* hanging out with Lucas Ellison!)

Lucas found two itsy-bitsy Jose Cuervos and ran to the kitchen, sliding in his socks on the swank cherry-wood floors.

As cool as I usually played it, it was hard not to be humbled by Mitsy and Lucas’s *schweet* pad, which apparently was Mitsy’s idea of “downsizing” after divorcing her big-shot TV-producer

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husband. Thank the real-estate gods for no prenup on *that* one! Thirty-five floors up, 2,800 square feet? Yeah, I'd like to downsize to that.

It was the kind of place I'd always dreamed about owning one day—big, not too showy. Simple and elegant. It was basically one gigantic room that included an expertly decorated living room—with the cushiest white leather couch I've *ever* had the pleasure of meeting—a chef's kitchen *swaddled* in stainless steel and marble, and a clear glass staircase that led up to the two bedrooms and TV den.

“So, Margarita-*sita*,” Lucas said as he broke up an ice tray, “who do you think I should make out with tonight?”

“Um . . . I dunno, sweetie. It's kinda slim pickins, no?”

“Yeah, I guess . . . But there's always Kenny Daniels.”

“If he's not too cracked out of his mind,” I warned.

We'd actually had a Kenny Daniels discussion already, back when Lucas told me on the first day of school he thought he was cute. Kenny *was* cute. But it pretty much stopped there. Unless you counted constantly moving your head like you're dancing to a never-ending trance song in your brain as evidence of a personality, Kenny simply didn't have one. Not to mention being a nineteen-year-old second-year senior. *Hells* no!

There was also this weird mystique surrounding Kenny. Last year, he mysteriously didn't show up to prom. Apparently, he'd had a little run-in with the cops and spent the night in jail. Next thing we know, Kenny's expelled from school for the rest of the

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year, and now he's back, doing Senior Year the Sequel. Since no one knows for sure what Kenny got arrested for, there are naturally a lot of rumors floating around as to what it could've been. My favorite one—right now, at least—is that he was busted for underage drinking at a strip bar. Thing is, it wasn't the *drinking* that caught the bouncer's attention. It was a ridiculously drunk and giggly Kenny pouring ice water on a dancer's boobs that got the bouncer's attention.

Honestly. No class.

(I'm fairly convinced he would've been doing the same at a full-frontal *male* strip club, but there weren't any of those in O'Town—or *I'd've* been there with him!)

“So *what* if he's cracked out?” Lucas asked me now, dropping a couple globs of mango sorbet into the blender. “He'll still be able to *kiss*, right?”

Oh, Jesus. I was already concerned that Lucas was entering the ever-dangerous rebound-boy territory. It was like a Pink Bermuda Triangle—once you got sucked in, you never got out . . . unless you treated yourself by therapy-splurging on Prada shoes.

“What?!” Lucas asked, in response to my nonresponse.

“Nothing!” I yelled. “Finish up those margaritas!”