

## Nico Medina

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By the time I'd had a couple more beers, the party had really picked up. Props to Madison for getting someone cool to deejay, because the music was great, and it just didn't *stop*. And unlike most gigantic house parties, this one had a pretty decent dance floor going, which I took *full* advantage of. I shook and grinded my way around the room, my hair flying in all directions, my boobs bouncing in my hot new shirt, my booty shaking furiously, sweat forming in all *sorts* of places.

When I got the hankering for a little Lucas–Madge grind time, I noticed my friend was nowhere in sight. He'd funneled his fair share of beer, too, so it would probably be smart if I made good on my long-standing promise to Mitsy and checked up on him. So I headed upstairs to look around. The only interesting things I saw were some half-naked people making out in a bedroom, a couple of freshman girls puking in a bathroom (one in the toilet, the other in the tub), and my friends Steve and Lance taking hits from their big glass bong they'd lovingly dubbed Walter Cronkite (they were big TV-production geeks at school and had their own Wednesday morning show).

I decided to kick the party up a notch, so I joined them for a few minutes. Steve and Lance were my boys. Totally cool. We'd known each other since freshman year—I really couldn't believe how grown-up we all looked now. They'd turned into little men. It was so cute.

Little men with strong weed, though. ¡*Coño!*

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“So, Madge . . .” I heard Steve say.

All of a sudden, I was craving chips something fierce.

“*Madge*,” he said again.

“What?” I asked, reluctantly snapping out of my food fantasy, which now involved green onion dip.

“You hear the latest scoop on our school’s little starlet harlot?”

“No!” I said excitedly. Too excitedly. Why the hell should I care? (But I guess I did.) “What is it?”

Lance took over for Steve (who was in mid-hit), saying, “We heard she’s, like, *running* for prom queen.”

“*Really?*” I asked shrilly. Too shrilly? I felt as if I sounded like a chipmunk or something. “Can you even do that? I mean, who *runs* for prom queen?”

“I guess you can do it,” Steve said, exhaling a monstrous cloud of smoke. “Man, I thought everyone knew about that? It’s been news for a couple weeks. But isn’t that lame?”

“Totally lame,” I agreed, though part of me was wondering why she’d do it in the first place. Bridget being Top Bitch at our school—not to mention a major TV star—she was sort of a shoo-in for the position. I wonder why she’d make such a big deal out of it.

“You gonna vote for her?” Lance asked Steve.

“I dunno . . . I don’t really think about it. But if she wants it that bad, I don’t see why not.”

“See, I’d rather vote for someone who *wasn’t* running,” Lance said. “Margarita, *you* should run. You’d have *my* vote.”

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“Aha,” I said, wagging my finger, “but if you wouldn’t vote for someone ’cause they were running, then why would you vote for *me* if I were running?”

Lance just stared blankly at me for a few seconds, then burst out laughing. “That’s some deep shit, Diaz!” he giggled. “I dunno how to answer that, but I *like* you!”

“I like you, too, Lance.” I smiled and patted him on the back. By now, the laugh bomb had gone off, and Steve was rolling around on the floor, giggling with his buddy. They were so adorable. Like Bert and Ernie—only not gay.

“All right, boys,” I said, standing up a little shakily. “I gotta skedaddle and procure myself some snacky-snacks. Thanks for the hit.”

I made my way back downstairs, itching to gab with Lucas all about this latest prom-queen development. I mean, come on! What freak runs for prom queen? Is it not enough that she’s got everyone in the palm of her hand—she’s gotta go ahead and be *crowned* for that shit? I guess it’s just her constant need to be number 1. That particular need bit me in the ass one time, hard, so I knew all about it.

Where *was* Lucas anyway?

Crap! The whole reason I’d gone upstairs in the first place was to look for Lucas.

I hoped he was okay, and had the good sense to switch to water soon after the funneling.

Madison’s place was even more packed than it was before. I’m

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talking, like, can't-make-it-to-the-back-door crowded. But it was fun, because I was running into practically everyone I knew. I loved being in school and seeing all these people in classes and at lunch and in the hallways and everything, but it's so much more fun to see them all in one place together, however hazy and muted the random conversations I was having with them were seeming.

(Eek. Those boys smoked some strong shit.)

Crap *again!* Now I'd forgotten why I'd gone *downstairs*: food!

I pushed my way hungrily into the kitchen and found an unguarded bag of Lay's. Taking it, I headed through the throng out the door to the pool deck. Finally, after making my way to the front of the keg line and getting another beer, I went outside the to the gigantic back lawn to look for Lucas.

Now, yes, I'd gotten sidetracked a couple times while looking for my best friend, but before you think I'm a *completely* horrible faghag, allow me to inform you that I know Lucas's alco-limit better than he does. I doubted that in this amount of time, he could have gotten drunk enough for me to worry. I mean, that boy was the blue-blooded Wasp Son of Mitsy, and he could hold his liquor pretty well. He was probably just outside for some air.

I headed down the grassy slope toward the lake, figuring he might be on the bench I saw near the shore. And, as it turned out, he was . . . but he was kind of horizontal, and making out with that cold-sore queen Kenny.

"Ew—I mean, um . . . *sorry!*" I yelled, which made Kenny jump about three feet in the air, right up from on top of Lucas.

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“Heeeey, Madge . . .” Lucas slurred at me. “Don’t worry about it . . . Kenny was just leaving, anyway.”

“Yeah, *tooooh*-tally,” Kenny said. “Hey, Margarita. Fab shirt.”

“Thanks.”

“Okay, see ya.” And off he went. Quite the conversationalist.

“So, Kissy McKisserton . . .” I teased Lucas when Kenny was out of earshot. “What was *that* all about?”

“Nothing.” Lucas sat up slowly and shrugged. “Just Kenny looked cute, and I wanted to kiss somebody.”

“Cute? Lucas, he had on a shirt that said TIGHT END. That’s not only stupid, it’s passé.”

“Look, *don’t* tell me who I can and can’t kiss!” Lucas blurted out suddenly. It was literally the closest thing we’d ever had to a fight. That little outburst. Craziness—Lucas had never talked to me like that. But as quickly as it came, it was gone. “I’m sorry, Madge,” he said. “I’m just still broken up about Zach.”

“Um . . . *hello*, Lucas?! You guys just broke up *today*. Take your time, sweetie—it’s *okay* to be sad.”

“I know, I know . . . It’s just . . . I feel guilty, because I already *like* being single again.”

“Really?” I asked, surprised by this. I thought I had my Lucas pegged as a one-man guy. But then again, I’d never seen the boy as angry as I’d seen him a few seconds ago.

“Yeah,” he said. “It’s like . . . now that I can be with people who are *okay* with being gay and out . . . I’m kind of all about it.” His shoulders slumped now, then he leaned forward,

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elbows on his knees, head in his hands. “But that makes me feel *guilty!* I was *devastated* this afternoon when Zach dumped me. And now I’m making out with someone else not twelve hours later, and I don’t care! Does that mean I *wanted* us to break up all along?!”

Wow, talk about conflicting emotions! Pink Bermuda Triangle, indeed. See? I know my shit.

“I don’t know, Lucas,” was all I could say, because it was true. I had no idea. All I knew was that I had to support my friend, right then and there. Never mind how much I liked Zach, how *little* I liked Kenny, and how thrown off I was by Lucas’s new go-with-the-flow-and-be-a-slut attitude—I had to be there for my best friend. For now, at least.

But just as I was about to continue with earning my gold medal in the Comfort Olympics, we heard a piercing cry of “*Ew*, I don’t want this shit beer!” in that signature *eh-mi-gawd!* voice of Bridget’s. Lucas and I looked down the lakeshore, and saw Bridget throw a cupful of Bud Light into the water. The poor sophomore guy who’d obviously tried to impress Bridget with a nice cup of beer practically *ran* back up the hill to the house. Bridget, all alone, crossed her arms and stared angrily across the lake.

“Hey, Lucas,” I said. “Know what might cheer you up?”

“What?”

“Bridget gossip,” I whispered conspiratorially.

So I told him all about what Steve and Lance had told me,

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about how dumb the whole thing seemed. And it did sort of perk him up a bit. But not all the way.

“C’mawwwn, baby,” I urged. “This sort of shit always makes you happy!”

“I know, I’m sorry . . . I’m just tired of talking shit about that girl. It’s not even worth our time.”

“Oh, *please!* Don’t act all above gossip—you read *Us Weekly* cover to cover every Saturday!”

“True, true . . .” He sniffed and put his face in his hands.

“Hey, Lucas,” I said again. “Know what might *really* cheer you up?”

“What?”

“You pay me twenty bucks, and I’ll go over there to Bridget, and I’ll ask her why she’s running for prom queen.”

He lifted his head, his face lit up. “Twenty bucks?!” he said. “Hey. Offer to be her campaign manager, and I’ll give you *fifty!*”

I was up and on my way before he even finished the sentence. I heard Lucas’s laughing fade away as I approached Bridget. This was the first time I’d *really* talked to her since I don’t know when, so it was a little surreal. Luckily, the weed and alcohol had emboldened me.

“Sup, Bridget,” I said as I approached.

“Yeah?” she asked, eyeing me suspiciously. “What do you want?”

“Why the attitude?” I asked.

“Um . . . how ’bout, I can’t get the taste of that piss-water domestic *beer* out of my nose, thanks to you?”

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“Sorry!” I said, holding my hands up. “Didn’t know you couldn’t handle half a cup of beer,” I teased.

She just glared at me.

“Look, the reason I came over here,” I said as matter-of-factly as possible, “is to ask if there was any truth to what I heard. . . .”

“You’re gonna have to be a *little* more specific than that, Margarita,” she said, seeming annoyed. “There’re a *lot* of rumors about me.”

“Right, right—the whole big-important-star thing,” I said under my breath. “No, I was just seeing if it’s true that you’re running for prom queen.”

She rolled her eyes and sighed. “Yes. That one’s true.”

“Um . . . mind if I ask *why*?” I said. “I mean, it’s . . . kinda . . . lame.”

“Right, okay. Well, I don’t think I need *you* to tell me what’s lame and what’s not,” she said, all nasal and obnoxious. “But I’m running because if I *don’t* get prom queen, what’s that gonna *say* about me? I can’t get into the good sororities if I got beat out for prom queen at some lame public school.”

“You sure you wanna be the typical shallow starlet who has to be the best at everything she does?” I blurted out, surprising myself with how much emotion was evident in my voice. “I mean, *I* wouldn’t want to be that. . . .”

“Yeah, well, *first* of all, there’s a difference between not wanting and not being able to get there in the *first* place.”

I tried to remain calm, but it was hard. This whole experience was somehow striking a nerve with me. “Oh . . . I get

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it,” I replied slowly, “I was probably *never* prom-queen material. *That’s* why I never made it as an actress—and why we’re not friends anymore.”

“Listen,” she said sternly, “this is *business*, okay? Not something you’d really understand.”

“Okay, what’s *that* supposed to mean?” Now I was just pissed. She was taking it there, and I was not really expecting it.

“I can’t believe you’re still not *over* all that, Margarita,” she said, tilting her head in what I could only assume was supposed to be an empathetic gesture. “It’s just unhealthy. Look, it was *one* part, *one* audition. I got it and you didn’t. It was no reason for you to drop your career and *gain* eight hundred pounds—”

“Why do you *hate* me so much, huh?” I yelled all of a sudden. I’d called her for *months* after that audition, and I got nothing back! “What *is* it about me? We used to be cool with each other!”

“Why do *you* hate *me*?” she fired back. “And what on *earth* makes you think I have the time or the *energy* to hate you?”

“Um . . . I dunno . . . the *Sweet 16* show? The silkworm remark earlier? How about when you asked Mrs. Grant if obesity was contagious when we were lab partners that one day in bio, before you transferred out of the class? Stop me whenever you want. . . .”

“Okay, what do you want, Margarita—an apology? Fine. I’m *sorry*. I’m *sorry* you didn’t get that part, and I’m *sorry* you showed up uninvited to my *Super Sweet 16* party, and I’m *sorry* about what I said inside, and I’m *sorry* that you have issues with your grossness. Anything else?”

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“I didn’t ask for an apology,” I said. “Just an explanation.”

“Oh, *GOD*, I *HATE* you!” Now *she* was hissy-fitting. “You wanna know what it is? Well, here ya go . . . I just don’t get why you think you’re so *fucking* fabulous. I mean, come on! That shirt? It’s like a flea market, with sleeves! And *why* you think people like you so much, I just don’t understand. It’s really kind of *sad*! You’re sweaty, you’re loud, and you dress *hideously*! I mean, can’t you see how *disgusting* you are? You think those people really like you as more than just a fat novelty item?! Don’t you see? You’re nothing but a fat piece of Puerto Rican trash!”

My vision went momentarily white with rage, and my anger exploded like Mount Saint Madge, my voice booming out, full force. “*¡Putá!* How can *you* think you’re so incredible?! You think everyone truly *likes* you? You’re just a cookie-cutter student-body president that everyone voted for because no one else bothered to run against you—’cause no one would have even *dreamed* of running against the fucking TV star *Bridget Benson*! But you’re nothing but *default* popular, Bridget. Those people in there care about *me*, not you. *¿Me entiendes?* You get it? You’re a soulless, *hateful* person, and you know it, and I cannot *wait* till you’re pregnant with some no-namer-wannabe-punk-rocker’s baby and in rehab at twenty-one with your career down the toilet—”

“Yeah, wouldn’t *that* make you happy? But you know what they say: eating—I mean, *living* well is the best revenge.”

“Look, Bridget,” I said, breathing deep and ignoring her last comment, “the fact remains: I might be fat, and I might have

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to have my clothes specially made for me, and I might sweat a little bit more than a hundred-and-two-pound sunken-in waif like you. But I have friends. *Real* friends. People who actually *give* a shit about me, which is more than I can say for you.”

“Wow.” She paused—for dramatic effect, I’m sure. “How long’ve you been waiting to say *that*?”

“Say what?”

“That you have friends, and I don’t.”

“You know the real reason I came over here?” I asked her, ignoring her question (and picturing the fifty dollars from Lucas in my head). “Because I was gonna offer to be your campaign manager for the race.”

“Right. You really think I *need* that, Diaz?” She cocked her head and gave me a pitying look.

“Well, no, but I’m gonna enjoy the fifty dollars I just earned.”

“What?”

“Nothing,” I said, trying hard not to smile. I decided to savor this a little, so I egged her on. “Hey, all I know is that you’ve supposedly been running for weeks, but not everyone knows about it. That’s kinda pathetic.”

“*This*,” she said, gesturing around my general vicinity, “is pathetic. Just get out of my face, all right? There’s no way you’d know what you were doing anyway.”

“Oh, yeah? *I* could probably get prom queen easier than you could.”

Bridget cackled evilly (you never see her do *that* on the D

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Channel!) and said, “I’m so certain I’d win, that if you beat me out, I’ll let you *personally* dress me in your freak-chic garb at my *OK* shoot this summer.”

Whoa, put on the brakes!

Did Bridget just challenge me to run against her for prom queen? And let me dress her for a major photo shoot if I won? This could be just the jump start my sister’s fashion career needed! (And it might be fun to watch this girl cry after all the horrible things she just said to me.)

“Are you for real?” I asked her, disbelieving.

“Sure, why not?” she said, shrugging her narrow shoulders. “Seeing you lose out to me *again* is gonna be a sad thing to witness, but it’ll be cute watching you try to impress me for the next few weeks.”

So then I had to ask, “Well, what do you get if *you* win?”

“Please. Watching you grovel is gonna be reward enough. But if you throw in never *talking* to me all randomly like this again, I’ll be plenty happy.”

“Works for me,” I said quickly. “Just get ready to lose by a landslide.”

She let out one of those fake “Huh-*ha!*” laughs. “Honey,” she said condescendingly, “the season premiere of my show fucking broke Nielsen *records*, okay? So we’ll just see about your little theory.” She turned around and strutted back to the party. “This is gonna be *so* fun, Diaz,” she called over her shoulder.

A minute later, she was back in the house, and it was just me

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and Lucas out on the lawn. I headed back to my friend, who—good man that he is—was holding out a crisp fifty-dollar bill.

“Did you ask if you could be her campaign manager?” he asked, still holding on to the bill.

“I did indeed.”

“You should get an extra ten for the fireworks display!” he said, handing it over to me. “What the hell happened?”

I told him everything—well, almost everything. I didn’t wanna mention how much she’d gotten my goat by bringing up that whole audition thing, and the unspoken implications about what all happened *after* it. It’d just make Lucas feel sorry for me, and that’s the last thing I needed right now.

What I needed right now was . . . to *celebrate!* Bridget was gonna *finally* be humbled like the subpar TV actress that she was, my sister’s fabulous clothes were gonna take the world by storm, and *I* was gonna be the first 200-plus-pound prom queen Winter Park High had ever seen. . . .

And I think that called for at *least* a celebratory round of shots!