

# *Sunshine is a lonely thing*

*By: Avery Anderson*

I know. I'm weird. I'm different. I stand out in the crowd. But it's probably because I don't have a crowd. Everyone gathers in the courtyard and laughs in the cliques they've had since middle school. I'm set apart and labeled as weird because somewhere along the years, I've lost mine. It's strange though, I think I would rather have no friends in the entire ever-expanding universe than to have had one best best friend that leaves you. Instead of leaving me alone and empty, she left me filled, with anger, guilt and questions. So many questions about what happened. Truth be told I don't know the answer to most.

Yes, I had been friends with Lizzie. Yes, she was always pretty. No, we didn't have a fight, I'm not sure what happened. No, we aren't friends anymore.

I sit at a big table at lunch, where the sun streams in and it looks like the big tub of margarine my mother keeps in the fridge. The lunch room is a bustling and loud. Everyone's table is crowded and full, but mine is empty. On the long bench there's a spot for at least 20 more people, but no one ever sits there. Just me. I feel so alone, just me and the sun, which has betrayed me in its own way.

It pours in like a spotlight, announcing "Hey! Look at this loser, reading her book and eating lunch all alone."

I'm most definitely different. The thing that caused me to stand out the most was my choices. I tried to blend in but it was hard. I don't wear crystal jewelry, I don't wear tube tops and short skirts and I don't swoon over self care. I've always been a little different, but it's never bothered me. Lizzie was different too. We would play with plastic horses all the way until sixth grade. We made each other colorful bracelets. We would go to the park to read and not play with the other kids.

But it's all different now. She didn't want to be friends with the girl who everyone stared at in the hallways, the girl who thinks it's better to be alone than in a big crowd. I thought we were friends for life. But then she changed, and I stayed the same and she moved into a big brownstone out of our simple neighborhood and I stayed. Living my simple life in my small house alone while she lived hers up in a mansion. It's so strange, there's this one person who knows all your secrets, regrets, whatever you whispered to them in the dead of night and then they just walk away. Well, not walk, drive. Drive away in a sleek new car and leave you standing on your dusty driveway waving at nothing.

I smile in the halls, trying to become friends with my peers. No one ever smiles back. They stay away from me like the plague. I've convinced myself that they are afraid of me because I don't follow the status quo. I've tried to be trendy; I watched Friends and bought face masks, but personally, I would rather watch a documentary with my face untouched by trendy, rejuvenating goop.

In class, it's not bad -- just when we have to pick partners. I'm always paired with the teacher or the boy who eats in the corner in the table next to mine. Illuminated by shadows, opposite of my sunlight. But today in class, my teacher assigned partners. My heart skipped a beat when she said Lizzie's and my name back to back. I flashed her a smile as bright as my lunchroom spotlight and she gave me a tight lipped no teeth smile people give each other when they aren't good enough friends to say hello.

"Today you and your partner will create a fiction story." Ms. Olsen announced directions to our partnered project.

My head was swimming with ideas. My hands briskly swept across the page jotting down every thought coming to mind. I could tell by her slouched posture Lizzie was not getting up, I plopped down in the seat next to her and laid my journal in front of her. Two pages were filled with drawings and ideas for the story we would write. There were drawings of snow covered grounds and horses and fairies all etched in pencil. She looked unimpressed.

"Anywhere where there is a star is a nostalgic moment I pulled straight from our past!" I said beaming.

"What past?" Lizzie interrupted abruptly. "We were friends for like a year." she was picking at her yellow acrylic nails. She might as well have been picking at my emotions, peeling away the polish just as she did my happiness. In my moment of fantasy and reunion I thought she would be glad to see me.

"That's not true." My voice was quiet, weak.

"Yes. It. Is. I don't need my reputation ruined because Wednesday Addams decided to tell everybody we are best best friends!" She snarled and her pinky nail fell to the floor. "You look pathetic." Lizzie growled at me. Ms. Olsen came over and glanced at my notebook.

"Did you know little Cassie Lang and I were best friends Ms. Olsen? She is just so smart and creative, could you pair us more often?" Lizzie said in a syrupy voice. I suddenly remember that syrupy voice. It was the same stupid voice she used when we got in trouble at the mall. The same stupid voice she used when she broke my lamp and tried to worm her way out of it with fake charm. Why had it taken me so long to remember?

"It's true." I said meekly. I plastered on a small and unconvincing smile. Lizzie eyes had wandered off from Ms. Olsen to her phone.

"Lizzie?" Ms. Olsen notioned to her rose gold cell.

"Oh! Ms. Olsen, I was just trying to find pictures of me and Cassie together. Whoops!" she looked straight at me. "I guess I deleted them all."

Ms. Olsen looked my way and saw my gloomy face.

"Perhaps we should work independently this time." Ms. Olsen suggested casually. Lizzie eagerly nodded her head her eyes focused on mine.

Leaping off the bus and bursting through the door I ran straight to my room. I collapsed on my bed and cried. My puffy red eyes found a framed photo of us, the edges of the rhinestone frame were blurry through my tears. I hadn't bothered changing anything about my room after Lizzie had moved.

We called my lime green room the Cassie Club, and her neon blue one, the Lizzie Lounge. Cheesy, I know. But it meant so much at the time to just have a friend who was strange like you -- someone who understood your fashion sense of chunky plastic jewelry and high heels on any day.

It was so much easier, but now it's so hard. I grabbed my earbuds off my nightstand and blasted OMD into my ears, ignoring my pounding headache. I ran over to the poster directly across from my bed. I tore it from the wall and then straight from the middle of the bubble lettered words Cassie's Club, I tore it. It felt so good to watch the purple stars Lizzie had drawn be torn up into a million pieces. She had done the same at some point in time too.

Cries bubbled out of me as I grabbed a bucket of gray paint from the garage. In moments the lime green room that was the infamous Cassie Club was covered in a thick lacquer coat of sadness, every memory lost in the process. The end of era.

My mind wandered to the reason why she left me, why didn't want to hang out with me. I wasn't popular. I had no friends, I sat alone at lunch even though I didn't want to. As I layed back on my bed an image of the cafeteria wandered into my mind. Me, of course alone, but the the boy in the lunch table across from mine alone as well. A thought briefly came to mind as I slowly closed my tired eyes and drifted off to sleep.

The next morning I held my head high and walked swiftly past Lizzie and her group of friends before they got the chance to giggle or mock. I walked past my usual lunch table and set my lunchbox down on the one across. I looked to the right of me and saw a stunned boy. He looked frail, with mousy brown hair and blue eyes. I saw his notebook filled with doodles of book and movie covers. I nestled into my spot and pulled in orange from the tin box on my lap. I smiled at him sweetly and he smiled back. Not the no teeth smile you give in hallways, but a real genuine smile. A smile as bright as my lunchtime spotlight.