

The Comeback

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Point

Chapter 1

I hadn't asked to be popular. In the beginning, I hadn't even thought about it. The only thing I'd thought about was the cute boy with the brown eyes and floppy blond hair. He wasn't afraid to admit he liked chocolate chip cookies, Monty Python movies, and me. Only later did that boy turn into Connor, the most popular guy in the junior class. But when we were freshmen, he was just Connor, who loved cookies, and I was just Sophie, who thought she could love Connor.

We were happy. But then we became popular, and it happened so gradually that I hadn't noticed that, pretty soon, popularity was what our entire relationship was about.

Connor and I first met at the country club where our fathers played golf. My parents had just gotten a divorce and it was my dad's idea of father-daughter

time to take me to the country club and then dump me at the pool while he hit the links.

So, I spent my days hanging out there with Monet. Back then, she'd just started calling herself that.

My best friend had interesting theories, one of which was that she had been given the wrong name. We'd agreed that since we'd both be starting high school in the fall, we would reinvent ourselves. To that end, I wasn't allowed to breathe a word of her real name to anybody.

Even back then, Monet and I had big plans. We were going to move to Los Angeles and become famous. She was going to rock the art world with her moody abstract paintings and I was going to become a film star. I was sure Monet was going to make it. She had the talent and drive to make it happen.

It was a little more complicated for me. You could look like a troll and be a character actor (in fact, sometimes troll looks were a plus), but a film star had to be beautiful. I was determined to have a physical metamorphosis and turn my plain old caterpillar self into a butterfly.

Back then, I'd just started to work out on a regular basis and was actually wearing a bikini to the pool for the first time. My braces were off and my hair was behaving. I remember thinking that I might actually be getting pretty. My transformation was well on its way.

Monet's older brother, Dev, was there, too. He splashed around the pool, showing off for a couple of girls in his sophomore class. They ignored him and so did we.

He hauled himself out of the pool to come bug us. "Imogene, can I borrow a dollar? I want something from the vending machine."

She ignored him.

"Imogene," Dev said.

"Don't you dare call me that in public," Monet hissed.

"It's your name," he pointed out.

"It's my *legal* name," she replied, "but I've told you, from now on I'm Monet, like the painter. And just for that, no, you *can't* borrow money."

Dev shrugged and dove cleanly into the water.

"He's a good swimmer," I commented.

Monet said, "He made the varsity swim team and it's totally gone to his head."

"He's on the *varsity* swim team?"

I made conversation, but I wasn't really paying attention. I was busy looking for someone. I'd had my eye on a gorgeous blond guy, Connor, who was on the swim team, too. We'd joked and flirted, but he hadn't asked me out yet.

"Well, it's the *only* swim team at Kennedy," Monet replied. Kennedy High School was an arts magnet

school, mostly known for its drama and music departments.

We giggled. I finally saw Connor as he entered the pool area, and my heart sped up. Would he come over and talk to me? We'd met formally a few weeks before. Some loser guy had hassled me in the parking lot and Connor had gotten rid of him for me. But we'd been noticing each other since the beginning of that summer.

He took a seat next to his friend Chase. There were a couple of girls nearby, but Connor didn't pay any attention to them.

I kept my eyes on him, willing him to look up and acknowledge my presence, but he was absorbed in his conversation.

A few minutes later, Dev came out of the water and flopped down beside me.

"Dev, you're dripping water all over," I scolded, but I didn't take my eyes off Connor.

Dev followed my gaze and snickered. "You like that poser?" he said.

"I don't know who you're talking about," I said.

"Connor Davis," he replied. "That's who."

I flinched when I saw Connor raise his head and stare over at us. He'd heard us talking about him.

"Could you keep it down, Dev?" Monet said. She turned to me. "He is perfect for you. Cute but shallow."

“Hey, wait a minute!” I said.

“You know what I mean,” she replied. “I’m not saying *you’re* shallow, but Connor has future prom king written all over him. Mark my words, he’ll be one of the popular kids at school.” She said the word *popular* the way other people might say *serial killer*.

I noticed Dev was listening to every word and gave Monet a nudge to shut her up.

“Hey, watch this!” Dev did a cannonball into the pool, soaking us in the process.

“Dev, you idiot!” I said. My hair was drenched. I was at the pool to be seen, not to actually get wet. Connor was walking toward us with his best friend, Chase, and a girl I didn’t know. The frizzies were imminent.

“What am I going to do?” I wailed to Monet. “I’m going to have clown hair in about ten seconds.”

She surveyed me. “You look good, Sophie. Great, actually.”

“But my hair!” I said.

“I think it looks fine,” she said, “but if it bugs you, why don’t you braid it?”

Genius. “Great idea,” I said. I rummaged through my beach bag and found a couple of rubber bands and quickly did my hair.

“How are you two gorgeous women doing today?” Connor said.

Monet stifled a snort and then said, "I'm going to swim laps. Later." She got up and dove into the pool.

"This is Vanessa," he said. Who was she? His girlfriend? Was this his way of letting me down easy?

Vanessa acknowledged me with a wave and said something to Chase. She examined her nail polish, clearly already bored with me.

"Do you want to get together and hang out tomorrow night?" Connor said.

"You mean with you?"

He smiled at me. "I mean *me*, with *you*."

"I'd love to," I replied. "And maybe we can double with Chase and Tamara."

Chase shook his head frantically.

Vanessa's head snapped up. "Who is Tamara?" she said, suddenly interested in the conversation.

"She's Chase's girlfriend," I replied.

Vanessa shot Chase a look of pure fury and it dawned on me that perhaps I'd missed something.

"That's very interesting," she said.

"Take it easy, Vanessa," Connor said easily. "Tamara is my cousin. She and Chase are practically brother and sister. Sophie just saw him giving her a hug, right, Sophie?"

I wanted Connor's friends to like me. "R-right," I said. I left out the part about Chase's hand on her ass.

Vanessa melted and launched herself at Chase. "Oh, baby, I'm so sorry I doubted you."

“So we could go out with *Vanessa* and Chase,” Connor continued.

I smiled at Connor gratefully. He’d rescued me from myself. I didn’t even notice, at least not then, that he’d lied with the smoothness that comes with years of practice. Maybe I didn’t want to notice.

During that summer, we became inseparable, and my blissful ignorance continued until our junior year. When everything fell apart.