

Today had gone well in class, Lianna and I had been shy but amicable, even if it hadn't been a life drawing class day. Those were apparently going to be a Monday and Friday thing moving forward. Classes were starting to settle down into a routine, and I was exceedingly thankful for that.

Last night I had finally sent her a text about working on our project, and we'd agreed to meet up after class today for that purpose. Which of course led to me standing in front of Lianna's door with my heart struggling to choose between sitting in my stomach or my throat. I was so desperately nervous right now, I was almost shaking. How could another girl even have this much of an effect on me?

When I reached up, the door opened the instant I knocked, revealing my assignment partner. Lianna looked good, her long dark hair had been tied up into a high ponytail, with a few tendrils allowed free to frame her face. She had some makeup on, although I was too mentally all over the place to figure out exactly what she'd done. Eye liner, maybe some blush? I don't know.

"Hey," she said with an uncertain smile.

"Hey," I said right back, mirroring her expression.

Oh this was so damn awkward.

"Uh, come in," she told me, opening the door wider and stepping aside to let me in.

"Thanks." Would her roommate be in here? Or had she left or something? Did she have a roommate?

Her room was identical to mine, save for the fact that one side looked mostly unused. I guess she didn't have a roommate then. That was somehow a relief and more terrifying at the same time. Completely alone with Lianna.

"I um, don't have a desk we can both work on, sorry. I guess we have to sit on the ground or something. I have cushions though," she told me, indicating an area in the unused alcove where she'd set two throw cushions down.

"That's okay," I said, not minding in the slightest. "I'm used to sitting down wherever while I draw something that has my interest."

Lianna's mouth hung ever so slightly open as she stared at me. What was wrong? Had I said something wrong?

"Right," she said after a few seconds, turning to grab her drawing stuff from the small desk set into the divider.

I followed her lead and sat down cross legged on the pillow that was evidently meant for me. We were silent for a minute as we set out our things and made ourselves comfortable, and I found myself taking glances over at her and the artistic tools she had. She had a lot of mid range stuff, the same as I did, but she'd gone all out on her pencils. I personally drew too much to bother with that tiny little extra flair that came with those pencils. I swear I had seen some normal ones in the alcove she slept in.

Clearing her throat, Lianna interrupted my thoughts. "I think I'd like to just spend today sketching randomly, try and get a feel for your face before we do anything crazier."

I nodded approval, but under my breath I mumbled, "You've already gotten a feel for my face."

Of course, she was like four feet away in a quiet room. She coloured when she heard me, her eyes staring pointedly down at her lap where her pad and paper sat blank.

"Yeah," she replied at about the same volume. "I guess uh, I mean... I'd like to uh, sketch you a bit. Yeah."

"Okay," I said, feeling just as embarrassed as she looked. Had I really just said that? Damn Glade you're an idiot!

We met each other's eyes over the intervening space, and almost involuntarily I cracked a smile. Mine was joined by hers soon after, and we both looked down at our pages with spreading grins. Alright yeah, so we both knew this was very awkward and kinda funny.

"I'm just going to start drawing," I said, picking out a pencil almost at random, happy to see it was one that would be usable.

Before I got serious about sketching, I'd liked to use pencils that had harder graphite, like a 4H or something, because it held a point longer and I could get those nice precise lines like Lianna always got with charcoal. As I'd moved further into becoming an artist, I'd swapped to the darker and softer ranges, like the 6B that was now in my hand. I liked the way you could get some

great dark lines, but if you were light with the touch you could still get a lighter one if you needed it. Basically, I'd picked out a sketching pencil.

I looked up from my page to really study Lianna, the way light from the window was hitting the contours of her face. I loved the soft gradients I found there, smiling as I traced them with my eyes. Something about a matte surface like that was just begging to be drawn. I could spend hours getting the shading of skin tones just right if I wasn't careful.

I blocked in the lines of her face first with a lighter pencil, then went back to my darker 6B to begin getting the body of the work in. It was fun, drawing her face, and not just because I was beginning to realise that I was well and truly attracted to her. It was like I was playing my favourite character in league, pulling off the perfect combo. Drawing was something I loved doing, and I was drawing a subject I was terribly intrigued by.

"Can you look up at me for a second?" Lianna asked softly. "Sorry, It's just hard to get your eyes right when you're looking down."

"No problem," I said, smiling back into those dark eyes of hers that I kept getting lost in. Like right now. Gosh they were just so damn pretty.

Watching her concentrate on me that deeply was an incredibly intimate experience, the way her eyes were so focused on me, the subtle twitches of movement as she glanced between drawing and subject. I felt myself growing warm, my heart pounding in my chest. I knew it was going to be hard to do this, hard to overcome my new and confused attraction for the girl sitting across from me.

Moving from her eyes to her lips, I noted the bow and arc of them, the way her she pressed her bottom lip inward while she concentrated, not quite biting it. She'd kissed me with those. She'd been a little drunk, and so had I, but we'd kissed. Would she make another move, or was she not interested in going anywhere besides the strange friendship we had?

"Thanks," she said when she was finished, giving me a bashful grin. "My turn now?"

"Yes please," I said, picking up my pencil with an unsteady hand.

I had wanted to draw her eyes since they'd met mine in anger almost two weeks ago, and now I was actually going to get to do it. I took my time, getting the shape just right, the shading around the eyes just right, then trying to capture the intensity of her iris and pupil. It was a challenge,

getting the depth of the black and brown into the sketch while still allowing for all the little ridges and lines within the iris.

It took me a while, but as I put down lines, they began to take shape, and I was so pleased with it that I couldn't keep the grin off my face.

"Sorry, I've just been wanting to draw your eyes since I saw them," I hastily explained, then realised what that probably sounded like. "I mean in like, an artistic way. Because they're really interesting and... yeah."

Her face lit up with a smile and she looked down at my drawing, "You did them well. Personally, I uh." She paused, looking embarrassed. "I wanted to draw your skin. I know that makes me sound like a serial killer or something but well, your skin is so ridiculously smooth. Like, I thought you were really good with makeup or something at first, but you just have like, perfect skin."

I felt anxiety well up as I remembered why that was the case. Something about transitioning had a habit of giving us trans girls really nice skin. I have no idea what the cause was, but in the online spaces I had briefly dipped into when I was starting out, it had come up once or twice.

"Yeah," I said, making a face as that spike of nervousness ran through me. "There's a reason for that."

I had to tell if I wanted to go further with, well, whatever was going on with us right? That's what you had to do, you had to tell them. But what if she was one of those lesbians who hated us? What if she threw me out of her room and refused to speak to me again? I didn't want to go back to that, I didn't want to see that anger of hers directed at me again.

It could go so badly, I'd be left with a single drawing of her to do an entire assignment with. She'd definitely not want to be in the same room as me without our class there. Would she out me in front of everyone? The more I thought about it, the more terrified I became. But I still had to, I felt like I needed to. I hated this, not knowing which people I could trust. There was always that part of yourself you held back as you asked yourself whether that person would turn around and despise you simply for being you.

I opened my mouth to tell her, regardless of my fear. She was watching me curiously, and I decided it was now or never. "I'm trans."

She blinked in surprise for a moment, then leaned forward. "You're trans?"

“Um, yeah,” I shrugged, feeling exceedingly awkward, terror continuing to build higher within me. She wasn’t reacting. Quickly, I continued with the explanation. “We um, we tend to have really nice skin. At least, that’s what I’ve seen on the internet. I don’t know why, maybe it’s something about the treatment? But yeah, that’s why my skin is nice. I think.”

“I didn’t realise,” she said quietly, staring at me with a depth of emotional intensity I had only seen from her during our first encounter. She hated me, she was looking at me the same as when she’d watched her laptop roll down the stairs.

“I’m sorry,” I blurted, reaching for my things to pack them up.

“No!” she said quickly. “I mean... well I don’t know what I mean but it’s okay.”

I stared at her, my pencil falling from my fingers into my pencil case. “What?”

She moved forward, too fast for my confused brain to react, and put her arms around me. She pulled me into a tight hug, really tight, almost painfully so. She was warm and real against me, and I was startled when I felt tears drip down onto my collarbone.

“It’s okay,” she whispered, squeezing me tighter still.

I didn’t know how to respond, what was going on here? Why was she hugging me? Even if she was fine with my being trans, this wasn’t like, a hugging situation was it? Certainly not a crying situation, at least on her part!

“Sorry,” she said, her voice raw with tears as she leaned back a bit to look at me. “I um, I just... I think I’m projecting on you a little. If that’s the phrase?”

“Uh,” I blinked, thoroughly confused now.

“My... well my parent was trans, but they never told anyone. Same way as you, male to female. Sat on it for years, already married to a straight woman, a job and kids. Until it was too late,” Lianna told me, her voice choking up as she tried to get a hold of her emotions.

This time it was me who reacted, pulling her into back into a tight embrace. I knew where this was going.

"I found... her. She... she... it was in the garage, the chair was tipped over and... I found the note too. I'm sorry I'm unloading this all on you. It's just... I guess I'm happy that didn't happen to you, and sad that it happened to my parent. I think I also just freaked out like, a lot. I'm sorry. You're the first trans person I've met in person. I went online after it all happened, I wanted to know why," she said, all in a rush as more tears wet my shirt. "Fuck, I'm sorry I'm just dumping this on you. Sorry, it's really rude."

It was even worse than I'd thought. To be the one find her loved one like that. To find the note... I couldn't even imagine the pain that would have caused. Suddenly my desire to kiss her was shouldered aside by the need to just hold and comfort her. I didn't just want to comfort though, I wanted to get her smiling again.

"No, it's okay," I soothed, still a little shocked by the turn the conversation had taken. Giving her a tentative squeeze, I added, "It's nice at least, to know you don't hate me over it."

"Definitely not," she said, her voice forceful, almost angry through her tears. "Point me to anyone who does and I'll fucking stab them. It's people like that who caused my parent to kill herself."

"Thank you," I whispered, feeling my heart swell with relief and happiness. Lianna didn't hate me over being trans, not even close. She was already ready to defend me against any crap I might get. She probably didn't even realise how good that made me feel.

We sat there in her room for a long while just holding each other like that. She calmed down, but we kept holding each other regardless. It felt so good, so calming to have her arms around me. I wondered what it would be like to wake up in these arms, to feel her caring touch first thing in the morning. I wanted that.

"You know, I feel like this was important just now," she said, breaking the silence. "Like we connected just now, in a way that means we're not just like, people who know each other from class."

"So like, we're friends?" I asked, hoping that I wasn't being friend zoned.

Lianna was quiet for a moment, then nodded, her hair tickling my cheek as she did so. "Yeah, something like that."

What did she mean, something like that? Was she hinting about the kissing thing again? Or was it the connection we had over the trans thing, her mother being one of those who wasn't fortunate enough to have support like I did.

"I would like to be friends with you," I told her, omitting the part about wanting to be more than just friends.

"I don't have many," she told me quietly, shifting slightly. Even that small movement sent little sparks running across my skin.

"Neither, not since I transitioned," I sighed, remembering how I'd missed the guys.

Lianna moved again, letting go of me to clear a space so we could sit against the wall. She grabbed some more cushions from up on the bed and put them down. Patting the space next to her, she looked at me expectantly. Why did she have so many throw cushions?

I moved to sit next to her, asking, "What are we doing?"

"We can do the assignment later," she told me with a small smile. "Right now, let's just talk."

I met her eyes curiously. "Oh, what about?"

"Tell me about your transition, if that's okay. I want to hear what it's like," she said, grabbing my hand and capturing it between hers.

All breath left my lungs as I watched her pull my hand to her lap. Gosh, gosh, gosh that was so much. I know hand holding is a meme or whatever, but my word! I had to pull my scattered brain back into one piece before I could figure out what to say.

"Um, I don't know, where do you want me to begin? I've never really talked about it much," I said truthfully. Very few people wanted to hear or were even comfortable listening to the nitty gritty of it all.

"Wherever you feel like. Sorry if this is weird. It's just, I want to know what my parent went through, what she might have gone through if someone had been able to help her," Lianna said shyly, one of her fingers poking at mine.

Gosh that was distracting, the way she kept fidgeting with my hand like that. It felt so nice though, I didn't want her to let go.

"I guess I'll start where your mother would have been at then," I said as gently as I could, watching her face for confirmation to continue. When she nodded, I ordered my thoughts and pressed on. It was very personal stuff, but I wanted to share it with her.

"So I was pretty young when I first started showing signs. I think I was like six years old when I got into an argument with my dad about wanting to dress up as a fairy princess for halloween. He just about had a heart attack that his *son* was being... you know, like that. Things like that kept happening, until halfway through middle school I couldn't ignore it anymore. I think I read a dumb book about a magical detective who got turned into a girl for a few chapters and that was that," I explained, trying to remember exactly how it had gone down.

"After that, in the space of like a month or so I just went from bad to worse as the realisations just kept crashing in. It's hard to explain, the descent into despair. That realisation that you were meant to be something, that something was so totally and irreversibly wrong. Puberty was finally starting to happen, the first little pieces of fuzz appearing on my upper lip. I remember wanting to throw up the first time I had to shave it," I said as the ghost of my emotions at the time swirled in my gut.

My new friend was squeezing my hand hard as she quickly interjected, "You don't have to keep going if it's too painful, I should have realised."

"No it's fine," I smiled, enjoying how close we were. The warmth of her was comforting as I kept going with my story. "I thought that I was done for. That I could never do anything about it. Except I slipped up. I have this aunt, she's amazing and she heard me say something, then cornered me and made me tell her. From then on she basically bulldozed my parents into being at least moderately accepting of it, educated them as best she could."

"She sounds wonderful," Lianna said, her face alight with happiness for me. The expression sending yet another little heart shaped arrow launching into me. She was so great.

"Yeah. I started blockers a few months later, got laser and then electrolysis to deal with the new hairs that had started growing. I wasn't allowed to start on hormones until later, and finally two and a bit years ago I got on them. I hid my transition through to the end of high school and then kinda... well, ran away from all my social connections. It was easier than coming out to each one individually," I said, feeling ashamed now that I knew how it had made Finn feel.



There was more to it, the way I'd almost come out a few times to my friends, but they were teenage guys. They said things, homophobic, transphobic things were just everyday jokes to them, and each one reinforced that I couldn't really trust them with my true self.

"I had to do something similar," she said sympathetically. "I went to an all girl's school, and they were really fucking bigoted there. Used to be a very wealthy catholic school but they had to drop that to get more students or they would have gone under. The homophobia stuck around though. I never came out as a lesbian back there, and I've ignored most of my friends from high school over the summer."

Lianna was a lesbian! She was a lesbian and she was also okay with me being trans! I felt relief flood through me, I finally knew where she stood on those two huge issues, and it was just as I'd been hoping.

"Yeah. People can be really awful," I said in response to her admission. "I had a few bad experiences early on, and that kinda led to me just hiding away until I felt my appearance was absolutely perfect. Even uh, down there. My parents actually spearheaded the whole surgery thing though, I think because they were uncomfortable about me still. They calmed down a lot afterwards, but the whole ordeal was really strange."

My parents had been weird about my being trans from the start. They were almost fanatical about erasing any evidence of my life previous to transition. I guess they wanted to pretend I had always been this way?

"Well, I have to agree with past you, at least in part," she whispered, smiling a funny little smile at me. "You look amazing."

"Um, thank you," I said, my expression struggling to choose between grinning and bashfully looking away. My cheeks weren't at all confused though, they heated up like a summer day in Phoenix.

I had no idea how to continue, but Lianna spoke instead. "You're okay now right? You're um, happy and stuff?"

I shrugged, still feeling a that little glow from her compliment. Of course, feeling good means dumb jokes from Glade. "I have a lot of problems, but dysphoria ain't one."

"Wow," she laughed, rolling her eyes. "Nice. I guess that answers that."

I grinned and flushed a little more, "Should we get back to sketching? We can keep talking too. You're really fun to talk to. But like, we do still have to draw each other."

"We do," she nodded, letting go of my hand and shuffling back to her drawing position. Wait shit, I hadn't thought that through! Come back! "Ready when you are," she smiled. "Oh wait, also you need to tell me about this aunt of yours, she sounds fun."

"You don't even know the half of it," I laughed, a dozen different wild tales coming to the forefront of my memory.