



Pretty Little

LIAR

by
Alessa

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"So... you gotta girlfriend?" Gabriel Anders stared at me from behind his thick eyeglasses with a creepy smile that scrunched up his nose and puckered his mouth. Freckles and acne dotted his pasty white skin, where eventually a beard would appear if he ever found where his balls were located. It was sad that he fit so stereotypically into the 'dweeb' category of our middle school ranking score, and I felt bad for labelling him so.

To be honest, I wasn't really into Gabriel as anything more than a lab partner. It wasn't because of his looks—although, let's face it, they didn't bear any similarities to even the least popular of Hollywood actors—but because his entire personality was completely awkward. As it was, I wasn't the most outgoing girl in seventh grade either, but at least puberty was mercifully kind to me.

I also failed to properly think about all the repercussions of creating a fictitious girlfriend at the time. The reason I invented a girlfriend instead of a boyfriend was to use her as the ultimate deterrent for guys like Gabriel asking me out on dates. Everyone knows that having a boyfriend doesn't stop other guys from competing with him, but once they find you're into girls instead of boys, their pestering immediately wanes, which was exactly what I was looking for.

However, in hindsight, inventing an imaginary girlfriend was probably my subconscious telling me something about myself that I had no inclination of exploring any further.

"Yeah, but she's already graduated from high school," I waffled on. It was an unconscious lie, one that I managed without batting an eyelash.

"Oh yeah?" Gabriel pushed his glasses further up his nose. "I never thought you'd be into girls, Abby. What's her name? Maybe I know her."

My cheeks glowed. This was so embarrassing, but I had to maintain the charade. I was pretty sure that whoever I mentioned would most certainly not have been in the same social circle as this guy, but I didn't want to voice that aloud.

"Um... Lyra Lux," I blurted and tried to smile. It came out flat. Who in their right state of mind named their kid Lyra Lux? It sounded like the name of a porn star.

He laughed loudly and stifled it to mere snorts as the class glanced momentarily at him for his outburst. "Lyra Lux?" he asked in disbelief once he'd composed himself.

I glared. "For your information, Gabriel, it happens to be a very respectable name. She comes from an old family of eminent artists, okay?" If I was going to pull this off, I had to at least feign offence. Old family of eminent artists? What the hell was I thinking?

Gabriel blinked and pushed his glasses up again. "I... Okay. Sorry, it's just a very uncommon name. I thought maybe you made it up."

Why had I thought of Lyra Lux? I wasn't sure exactly. It had reminded me of a bad eighties hair band or a metal band of some kind. As biology classes went on, it became known that Lyra Lux did not play in a metal band, but an indie one. She was on tour most of the time because her band was about to break into the indie scene "big time". The band's name? The Peaches. Why? At the time of questioning, I was holding a lunch box that contained a sandwich and a peach, all packed carefully by my Mom. This visual association would later come back to haunt me because the peach in the lunch box was staring back at me, saying, 'you know what to do'. I was officially the biggest liar in the universe, or at least, my universe.



"Abby, you never told me you had a girlfriend!" One of my closer friends, Claire, exclaimed one afternoon at lunch. I didn't really have a best friend, but Claire was around enough that I considered her a friend.

I blinked and tucked a strand of short blonde curls behind my ear. "Who told you that?"

Claire shrugged, her brown locks bouncing. "That Gabriel kid. He told me he hasn't asked you out because you said you like girls and you have a girlfriend." When I didn't answer, pretending to be enthused with my sandwich, she continued to press, "So when did you get a girlfriend, and why was I not informed?"

I should have told her the truth—that Lyra Lux was merely a fictional character to get me out of dating Gabriel Anders and all the other insufferable boys in our school. But for some reason I didn't. Instead, I shrugged and told her about Lyra Lux. I told her that she was tall, not extremely hot, but cute in a girlish way; a skater girl with messy black hair that made her look like a rebel with cool green eyes and dimples. She played guitar and liked to wear funky sneakers, ragged skinny jeans, and old vintage thrift store T-shirts.

Now, I have to make this clear. I never saw myself as gay. I didn't go for girls, let alone girls like the one I had described, girls like Lyra Lux. All my romantic fantasies until now have centred around smart guys, the ones who played sports, got straight A's, and could carry on an intellectual conversation about literature and historical events. I wanted a guy who was going somewhere with his life and, ten years down the road, could take care of a family—not that I was looking for that lifetime partner, but it was a trait that I admired all the same.

"Aw, she sounds so cool," Claire gushed when I described my supposed girlfriend.

I smirked and blushed a little because she'd believed my lie. Claire probably mistook it for one of bashfulness.

"Uh... yeah, she is."

It was after that moment that I began making up more lies about Lyra Lux and me. She became my excuse for every party I didn't want to attend, the reason I hadn't answered the phone, the one who would beat up any boy who dared touch me—when she was around, of course. Most of the time she was in the city, where she lived with most of her bandmates in a house somewhere on Oxford Street.

By the end of the month, I had more than two people convinced that I indeed had a girlfriend named Lyra Lux. Claire thought it was "simply adorable", while Gabriel supposedly moved on to Vicky Summers, a girl in his math club. I was left with my lie hanging over my head, and no matter how much I wanted to tell someone that Lyra Lux did not exist, the idea of her kept me stubbornly refusing.

To be honest, it was kind of nice to have an imaginary girlfriend in my life. I made up stories about us and all the things we did together; how she taught me to skate and play guitar, how we went on a date to the zoo and ate ice cream while watching dolphins jump through hoops. The lie grew and grew until even I almost believed that Lyra Lux was real and that I was in love with her.



All of it began to unravel in a single morning when I spotted a flyer for a concert that was coming up the next Friday. On it was a list of the four bands playing: Schoolgirl Strippers, Disco Dolls, The Peaches, Innocent Killers. I gulped, rereading the black and white slip of paper to make sure I had read it right.

See, what I hadn't noted was that when staring at the peach in my lunch box and telling Gabriel that my fake girlfriend played in a band called The Peaches, I was really thinking about a conversation I'd had with my sister the day before. She had been telling me about an up-and-coming alternative band called the Peaches, and she'd been washing a peach while doing so. Damn stupid visual associations. Damn those stupid peaches.

"Why didn't you tell me that she was playing in town?!" Claire waved the advertisement in my face and grinned. "You must be so stoked!"

"Thrilled," I muttered, wondering how I could get out of this one. Feign illness? But what if Claire then spotted the first black-haired girl playing in the Peaches and began going on about the "us" that didn't exist? "Hey, um... Claire? About that concert..." I sighed.

"Tell me you got us in for free. There's no way I can come up with ten dollars by the end of next week; I don't get my allowance until the end of the month. Don't you get a 'groupie' pass or something?" Claire had told me once that her parents would give her only a few dollars of pocket money because they were afraid she would lose focus on her studies.

I blinked and twisted the strap of my book bag. "Uh... yeah, well... that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I have an extra ticket, but... we have to go a little later than everyone else." Lie, lie, lie. Was there a separate section of Hell reserved for the best liars? If so, I would be calling it home.

For the rest of the day, Claire talked of nothing else.

I arrived early to the show decked out in some raggedy old jeans and a T-shirt—nothing special. Not too many people had shown up yet, though it was no wonder as there was still about half an hour before doors opened. The boy at the door gave a friendly smile as I walked up to the tilting table he sat behind.

"Uh, hi. I have a favour to ask," I began, my cheeks turning a nice shade of red, like they always did when I talked to strangers.

Suddenly I heard my name being called, and Claire came rushing towards me with a beaming smile. My eyes widened at the sight of her, not because she looked fabulous—she did—but because she was early. She was early, and she wasn't yet on the guest list. And neither was I.

"Claire... hi?" I squeaked, still dumbstruck. "You're early. A lot early."

Claire shrugged as if it were nothing out of the ordinary. "My mom had to go to a meeting, and she was my only ride. So, where is she? I want to meet this girl of yours."

I glanced at the boy sitting at the table, observing us blankly. "Um..."

Claire stepped in before I could get a word out. "Hey, we should be on the Peaches' guest list."

The boy looked down at a sheet of paper marked up in black marker. "Name?"

"Um... Abby," I managed weakly. This was a bad idea. I could feel my face burning a nice shade of red already.

I watched as he triple-checked. "Nope, not on here."

"We're on the list," Claire stated firmly. "Her girlfriend plays in the Peaches. Maybe she forgot to add us or something."

"Uh... Claire..." I tugged on her sweater, embarrassed about her proclaiming my alleged love preference to complete strangers, but she ignored me.

Door Boy rolled his eyes. "I'll ask." He stood and opened the door to where the sound of tuning guitars could be heard over loud speakers. I didn't hear, but he called to someone and came back out, plopping down on his seat. "Someone's coming."

My eyes widened even further. This was terrible. This was a nightmare come true. My lie was coming back to bite me in the butt and it was entirely Gabriel's fault! Well, I suppose I should have blamed myself.

"Claire, I have something to tell you. Just don't hate me, okay?"

"What is it?" Claire looked half-distracted and slightly impatient at having to wait.

"I don't—" but I was cut short when the door swung open and there stood... a girl.

She was tall, not extremely hot, but cute in a girlish way. Black hair swept about her head in a messy fashion, and her eyes twinkled a cool green. She wore a vintage tee with worn-out black skinny jeans, holes forming at the knees, and bright neon sneakers. She was exactly who I'd pictured when creating Lyra Lux in my head—the same Lyra Lux that didn't actually exist. Was I dreaming?

"Hey, what's up?" she looked at Door Boy before spotting Claire and I standing there, her eyes lighting up in sudden recognition. "Abby!"

All air left my lungs as she scooped me up into a hug and lifted me off the floor, twirling me once before setting me down again. Tucking some hair behind my ear, she leaned down and kissed my forehead affectionately. A tingle shot down my spine. "I missed you."

"Aw, you two are so cute!" Claire gushed with a sappy smile on her face while I stood there looking like a gaping fish.

She seemed rather amused by my reaction and kissed my cheek this time before turning to Claire, holding out her hand. "Hey, I'm Lyra Lux."

"Claire. Abby has told me so much about you." Claire shook her hand warmly and continued grinning.

This was a joke. This was a sick joke. Wasn't it?

I had no time to contemplate any more as I was being tugged by a very persistent fake girlfriend past Door Boy and into the main concert area. The venue was a large multi-purpose hall with a makeshift scaffolding platform and a small table off to the side where the sound man resided. Merchandise booths had been set up near the far right wall, and seemed to be the main hangout spot for the bands.

Claire grabbed my free arm and looped her own around it, staring around as if she'd never been to a concert before. I wasn't sure if she had or hadn't. Truth be told, I didn't know all that much about Claire, except that she seemed to like me as a friend. That was all. I was not only a liar; I was also a terrible companion. I sighed suddenly, feeling completely overwhelmed and confused by the mysterious girlfriend and my best friend who had sandwiched me.

"I have to sound check, but I'll be back in a sec, okay?" Lyra Lux gave me a quick peck on the lips, leaving me stunned, and headed towards the makeshift stage where a few other girls had already waited.

Claire sighed rather dreamily and nudged me. "I hardly know her, and I already think you two are adorable."

I attempted a shrug. "I... guess."

"Don't deny it; you guys have obvious chemistry!" She smiled a cherubic smile and said she had to use the ladies room.

While she was gone, I used the time to find a far-off back wall to sit against and figure it all out. Lyra Lux existed. That fact sunk in and caused my brows to dip towards each other. Lyra Lux had never existed. I'd never met any of the members of the Peaches in my life; that much was certain. Or was it? The more I thought, the more muddled I became, and finally I pulled out a book and buried my nose into it with frustration.

As the Peaches checked their sound, various kids began to trickle in. The room became louder, but I tuned them all out rather easily, a talent I had acquired early in life.

Suddenly I felt a warm body sit down next to me, so close that our arms touched and my personal bubble was notably invaded. I realised that the sound check had stopped, and now the echo of teenage voices bouncing off the walls and music over the PA system dominated.

"Trying to hide again?" Lyra Lux pulled up her knees near her chest and rested her arms comfortably on them. She had a few gemstone wire rings on her fingers and a couple of bracelets on her wrists.

I shrugged, still uncomfortable with the fact that she thought herself my girlfriend. "I don't like big crowds."

She snatched my hand and rubbed her thumb across my knuckles, sending jolts of electricity down my spine. "Don't worry," she said with a sympathetic grin, "I'll protect you."

"Right," I muttered with a roll of my eyes.

"Hey, I saved you from those pigeons, didn't I?" She quirked an eyebrow and stared expectantly.

I just about choked on air. She was referring to a story I'd told about Lyra Lux—the one where she and I had been at the park feeding pigeons. They'd ambushed me, and she'd scared them away. I'd been so shaken up about it that I hadn't been able to make it to a party I'd been invited to. My stomach roiled with uneasiness and guilt. How had she known that?

"Come on, the band wants to say hi," she popped up and held out her hand.

I packed my book into my bag and stood without her proffered hand, still trying to figure out what dimension I'd landed in that my dreams and lies had become reality. Instead, she slung her arm around my shoulders with a cheeky grin and winked at me when I cast her a confused stare. She said nothing as we wound through the growing crowd to the side of the room where the merch tables sat, already enticing more than a few teenagers.

Several girls sat on old orange plastic chairs with several bottles labelled with various pops, though I had a feeling that they contained more than that. Claire sat with them, seemingly already introduced and perfectly at home with the strangers. I didn't recognise any of them, though they appeared to light up with familiarity at the sight of me.

Within a few minutes of awkward conversation – mostly from me—I grabbed Lyra Lux's hand and found it in me to eke out a sentence or two. "Can you excuse us? We have some, um... some catching up to do."

"Don't be long," Claire winked, and accepted a Seven-Up bottle from one of the girls, taking a swig seemingly without care of its contents.

I dragged Lyra Lux behind me into the handicapped washroom, where I knew we could be alone and I could interrogate her properly. Whoever had set her up for this was going to get ferreted out, or else.

"Slow down a little," Lyra Lux chuckled as we burst into the bathroom, and I locked the door behind us, spinning around and leaning against it as if it would prop up my gelatinous legs. She grinned a little, dimples forming as she leaned forward and –

"Stop!" I held out my shaky hand and swallowed down the butterflies wreaking havoc around my insides.

This had not been how I'd envisioned my master plan. I had been going to pay for Claire to get in free ahead of time. She would have thought she'd been on the list, and I'd have been home free, claiming that Lyra Lux and I had had a fight and weren't speaking to each other. We would have left early. I would have been safe. Instead, I found myself staring into the intense green eyes of a girl I had never met—or at least... I was fairly certain I had never met her.

Lyra Lux seemed bemused and perplexed at my reaction. "You okay, honey bunny?"

I swallowed hard. "No."

Her lips brushed softly against mine before I had time to push her away. My face heated up as she pulled away, with slight traces of surprise entering her eyes. She blinked them away with a smile.

"Better?"

"I... I—I thought you were a dream," I managed, my heart still racing erratically. Inwardly, I cursed myself for sounding like a preschool idiot.

She chuckled. "I haven't been gone that long, have I?"

I pinched myself, just to make sure. No, it was real. My brows furrowed in utter confusion. "You—You're, I mean—you don't exist—I mean, I made you up. You were just make believe. H—How are you here right now? How do you know me? What is going on?"

Her brown eyes clouded with confusion. "Abby, you're freaking me out. Are you sure you're okay, sugar?"

I pushed past her and sat on the closed toilet lid, pressing my hands to the side of my head, propping my elbows on my knees. "Just... Just indulge me for two minutes, okay? How did we meet?" I turned to catch her gaze, only to find her staring at me.

She smiled with seemingly fond memories. "You were in the park reading your book and not watching where you were walking, as usual. I skated by and knocked you over in the process. You scraped your knee, and I had some band aides in the van..." she shrugged. "I took you for ice cream and asked to see you again... Seriously, Abby, what's going on?"

I felt as though I was going to throw up. That was the story I had fed everyone in exact detail. My heart began drumming in my ears, or perhaps it was whoever had started playing, and I was feeling my chest tighten with every beat. Hyperventilation seemed like the only logical next step.

"Hey, hey," suddenly she was crouched in front of me, holding her hands over mine, still pressed against the sides of my head. "Talk to me."

I shook her hands off and burst, feeling tears welling up in my eyes. "You are a lie! I made you up so Gabriel wouldn't ask me out, alright? You don't exist in real life! Do you understand now? You're fake! Who put you up to this? Was it Gabriel? If it is, can you just tell him I'm sorry? I'm sorry!"

She didn't seem to notice my rant of questions; instead, she just frowned and pulled me up so we were standing. "You're shaking," and with that, she wrapped her arms around me and rested her head atop mine. "Just breathe for a second, and then we'll sort this all out. I promise."

As much as I wanted to freak out and search for Claire, because surely she would know what was going on, I unconsciously obeyed and found myself taking deeper breaths, resting my head against her chest, and feeling a sense of calm. My thoughts seemed to sort themselves into clearer patterns. Guilt coursed through me just as strongly, however. Then I knew what was going on. The pieces clicked into place with clarity.

"Claire put you up to this, didn't she?" I asked quietly, still pressed up against Lyra Lux's chest quite comfortably.

She paused, rubbing circles on my back. "She might have."

For some reason, this didn't shock me as much as it should have. I might have expected something like that if I'd taken the time to get to know her more.

"Who... Who are you in real life?"

A light chuckle rumbled in her chest. "In real life? In real life, I'm just Ashley Davis."

I leaned back to stare at her, eyeing her critically. "Ashley Davis?"

She nodded with a quirked lip. "Honest to goodness truth. You can check with my mother."

"And the band?"

"The band is real, but they were playing along too. Claire's my cousin." At my widened eyes, she laughed a little.

"I guess I shouldn't have lied to her in the first place. It's just..." I trailed off, finding my reasons for doing it rather pathetic.

"It was nice to have a girlfriend for awhile?" Ashley filled in for me, and I nodded.

A loud succession of knocks rapped against the door and cut off anything Ashley might have been going to say. I realised I was still in her arms and pulled away quickly, unlocking the door to find Claire standing there.

"I'm sorry I lied." I blurted out immediately.

She glanced past me to Ashley, who motioned that I knew everything. A sigh escaped her lips.

"I can understand why you would lie to a guy like Gabriel, but honestly, Abby, why would you lie to me?" Claire looked... hurt. I'd never really hurt anyone before, physically or emotionally.

I didn't like the feeling of guilt that overcame me. "I..." My eyes fell to the ground, where I pushed a few bits of paper towel around with my shoe. "I guess I just liked the idea of having... someone—a real friend."

"A real friend? What am I if not a friend?" The more I talked, the more I seemed to hurt her.

"I didn't mean it... like that," I tried to correct. "I just mean... I... I don't know."

"Abby, the reason you don't consider me a friend is because you won't let me near you. You keep yourself so closed off from everyone else with your stupid books that no one could ever be your friend," she sighed again. "Not even me..."

We stood in silence for a moment before I looked up. "I'd like to be your friend, Claire. I just... don't know how. I'm sorry."

Her arms were folded, but after a few moments, she suddenly squeezed the air out of my lungs in a bear hug that I had no time to react to. "Just don't do it again."

"Promise," I wheezed, and felt my lungs re-inflate once more.

"Well," Claire stated, looking to Ashley, "I suppose I should introduce you—this is my cousin, Ashley. The only reason she went along with this plan was because she said you were cute."

My face flared immediately, and I barely glanced at the girl, nodding instead and inwardly smiling. She winked when she caught my eye, unabashed at the fact.

"I think I'll keep my hair black," she said, running her fingers through her mop as we began heading back towards the concert.

The rest of the night went on less oddly than before. I was formally introduced to the rest of the band, and we had a good time laughing and joking around while listening to the bands that went on. The Peaches eventually made their appearance as well. They weren't half bad, actually. Claire coerced me into dancing with her. She was a spunky little thing, as was her cousin, which I found a little overwhelming but comforting all the same.

At the end of the night, Claire and I said goodbye to the girls, with no promise of another meeting in the near future. I couldn't help smiling, though. Out of a silly lie, I had managed to make more friends than I'd ever had.

"You just needed to get out more," Claire grinned, nudging me with her elbow. She couldn't have been more right.



Gabriel heard the rumours and gossip that spread rampantly through the school halls. In an instant, it seemed he began making more conversation than usual, attempting to flirt, though it was a sad sight to behold. Claire had tried to help, though it was hard when Gabriel was around almost constantly. I knew he was simply working up the courage to ask me out, and I dreaded it.

The day did arrive near the end of lunch one afternoon. Claire and I sat in the cafeteria, a large open forum with large windows that let in the sunshine.

"Don't look now..." Claire warned in a sing-songy voice, nodding behind me.

I knew already and stood quickly, gathering the remnants of my lunch and heading towards the nearest garbage can. I heard Gabriel's awkward footsteps before I saw his face.

"Hey, um, Abby," Gabriel called out. "How was your lunch?"

I shrugged with disinterest. "Fine." My eyes still wouldn't meet his, too busy being distracted by the cleaning of my tray and its safe return to its family stack.

Gabriel pushed forward with a clearing of his throat. "So, I was just... wondering if maybe—well, if maybe..."

"Abby!" A familiar voice cut through the awkward question, attempting to jump out of Gabriel's lips. "There you are. I've been looking all over for you."

I turned and had barely a second to notice black hair and cool green eyes before her lips came crashing lightly on mine. The kiss wasn't overly passionate or dramatic; it was genuine and... real. I blinked as she pulled away and grinned, turning towards a gaping Gabriel. "Hey, I'm Lyra Lux. You must be Gabriel." She held out her hand and shook it firmly with my shell-shocked lab partner.

"But I thought..." Gabriel sputtered, staring from me to Lyra Lux and blinking in more confusion. "Well... I," he took a deep breath, and I felt bad for him. "I'll see you in class then."

I watched him go before turning to my fake girlfriend. "What are you doing here?"

She shrugged. "Claire said you needed some help... And I may or may not have wanted to see you again."

"But... why?"

Dimples formed again as her eyes twinkled. "I like you, Abby—a lot. I mean, I know that I don't know you that well, but... you're adorable, and smart, and funny, and I like being your girlfriend—even if my real name isn't Lyra Lux."

"I'm also a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl who reads books and lies to her friends. Why would you want to go out with someone like me?"

"Because your lips are sweet and your eyes are pretty, and I want to write awesome love songs about you for my band."

My face heated, and I knew it had turned into a nice cherry tone. "...Oh."

She had to bend down to see any expression, as I was anxiously staring at the floor. "You can call me Lyra Lux if it really means that much to you..."

I laughed a little and shook my head. "No, Ashley's fine."

"She is," Ashley agreed with a little smile on her face, "Very fine. But you would absolutely make her day if you said she could pick you up Friday night and take you on a date. It probably wouldn't be anything fancy, seeing as she's a starving musician, but she promises it'll be very entertaining."

My smile stuck in place. I nodded. "You can tell Ashley that, um, that would be great."

"Great," she leaned in and kissed my cheek sweetly, sending my face into a new shade of red. "Until then."

I stood there and watched her go as if she were the only one in the room. Claire's presence registered in my peripheral vision several moments later. She nudged me with a knowing smirk.

"Looks like you have a girlfriend named Lyra Lux after all."

A goofy grin turned up the corners of my mouth, one that I knew looked utterly ridiculous, but I didn't care.

"Yeah, I guess I do."

The End