

# #justsaying

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Novel. Contemporary drama

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## #JUSTSAYING

It was only a prank.

A childish act of revenge. Nothing more than a stupid throwaway comment I posted on a social networking website. I didn't mean to cause so much trouble. Or harm. The situation, it just... spiralled out of control.

Sixty-nine characters (including spaces), that's all it took to ruin the lives of so many...  
...and cause the death of one.

If only they'd taken note of the hashtag at the end of my sentence.

#justsaying

It told the whole world that my post was nothing more than a casual remark, and definitely not a proven fact. Just something I blurted out to the social media universe in the heat of the moment. If only they'd opened their eyes, if only they'd stopped to think, if only they'd stepped back and realised I was JUST SAYING...

...then nobody would have taken the post so seriously.

And Aimee Taylor would still be alive...

#REGRET

Oh, God, I am hurting, I am bloated with regret, I am the proverbial emotional wreck. I am sorry, so very sorry. More sorry than you think. More sorry than anybody thinks. My dizzy head is packed to the rafters with a zillion thoughts, all jabbering and squawking, each one out-shrieking its rabid neighbour, a hectic zoo of black noise. And the pain, it comes in waves, ferocious and stormy, crashing and smashing against my fragile beach, relentless and unremitting, eating away at my splintered soul.

I doubt I will ever bathe in the rich and zesty pool of happiness again. Not after this.

\*Insert long-trailing sigh of regret here.\*

Look, just for the record, I am not a bad person. I'm telling you the truth, I am the proud owner of a good heart. Of course, this very fact doesn't stop everybody currently hating my guts. ☹

Okay, hands up, I admit my sins, I shouldn't have done the dirty deed. I guess, at the time, I wasn't thinking straight. But in hindsight... well...

Oh, how could I have been so stupid? The point is, I made a massive mistake, I know that now. But let's face it, I'm only human. Or am I a monster? I'm not exactly sure what I am any more. What I did was vile and bitchy. No, no, worse than bitchy. A truly unforgivable act, callous and cold-hearted, fuelled by a raging inferno of odious spite I didn't even know I had in me.

Fine, I deserve it. Guilty as charged. If I was outside looking in, I'd hate me as well.

Anyway... it was Aimee's mother who made the shocking (no, actually, make that totally gut-wrenching) discovery that morning. It must have been horrible for the poor woman. I'm guessing it played out something like this...

## #DISCOVERY

Aimee Taylor's mother posted a family of impatient knocks upon the parent side of her teenage daughter's bedroom door. 'Aimee!' she hollered through the wooden barrier. 'Just because you're off school at the moment, it doesn't mean you can doss in bed all day.'

Mrs Taylor waited for a response. Any response. A grunt, an mmm, a keep your hair on, anything. None of the usual suspects made an appearance. Instead, she was met by the cold, stark nothingness of silence. More knocks followed, harder this time, those of the cross and irritated variety.

'Aimee! Ignoring my words won't make me go away.'

Again, zero response.

That's it, no more Mrs Nice Mother. She barged into Aimee's domain and marched over to the motionless human shape which resided under its duvet cocoon. 'Get out of that bed right now! You can help me with the housework.'

Met by further defiance from her daughter, Mrs Taylor tore the duvet free of the bed. Aimee lay in silence, eyes closed, body inactive, out for the count. Typical lazy teenager.

It was time for the employment of rough nudges. 'Aimee.' Followed by a series of sharp prods. 'Aimee!' Prod, nudge, prod. 'I'm not going to tell you again, young lady.' More nudging, more prodding. 'Don't you dare pretend you're asleep. I've had quite enough of—'

Her sudden pause heavied the air; the ice-cold, foreboding halt owed to the bottle of pills taking pride of place on the bedside cabinet. The very same bottle of pills Mrs Taylor had been prescribed by her doctor for her current bout of insomnia. What the hell was her medication doing in her daughter's bedroom? Then oh, God, fearing the worst, but hoping her grave prediction was so very wrong, she grabbed the bottle and gave it a shake.

Almost empty.

Argh, wearing the contorted face of bulge-eyed horror, Mrs Taylor snatched the girl by both shoulders, shake, shake, shake! ‘You stupid girl! How many pills have you taken?’ Upon each rigorous shudder, Aimee’s head flopped forwards and backwards like that of the proverbial rag doll. ‘Aimee, can you hear me? How many have you swallowed?’

Reaching the point of irrepressible hysterics, the mother switched to and fro between shaking her daughter’s limp frame and tapping her pallid cheeks, struggling to free the cataleptic teen from the bottomless abyss of pitch-black unconsciousness.

Still, there came no response.

‘Speak to me! Please! Oh, God, no!’

The hurried, heavy footsteps of a man signalled the arrival of Aimee’s father into the room. ‘What the hell’s going on?’

‘Call an ambulance!’

‘Why, what’s happened?’

‘Just do it! Now!’

As Aimee’s father thundered down the stairs on a mission to locate his elusive mobile phone, the sobbing, whimpering, snivelling Mrs Taylor cradled her daughter within a cage of arms and refused to let go. This parent was adamant, if the Grim Reaper turned up right now to collect the soul of her only child, he’d have a bloody good fight on his hands.

However, little did she know, it was far too late to save Aimee Taylor.

Death had already been and gone.

#NOW (The present day)

I've finally been granted my wish. I'm famous. Sort of. And popular.

Actually, no, not popular. Notoriety on an inflated scale doesn't always come hand in hand with mass adoration, as I've now discovered... the hard way. In the fame game sense, I'm currently more known and recognised than infamous and celebrated. You see, I recently played the starring role in a news story. A big news story. In fact, totally humungous, featured all over the internet, in newspapers, on the radio, on national TV, the works. This is why I'm famous. Sort of. But not in a good way. No, my sole claim to fame doubles up as the worst blunder of my life. Like, totally ever.

\*Insert facepalm here.\*

No, actually, make that a double facepalm.

Oh, yes, it's true. I (the just-turned-sixteen-year-old schoolgirl known as Mallory Finch) have screwed up everything. In the crippling wake of Hurricane Mallory, way too many people around me have been left emotionally gasping and flapping like landed fish. This is the very reason why I now find myself with a rucksack hooked over my shoulder, creeping out of the front door of my parents' house at idiot o'clock, roughly translated as either 3.00AM in the absolute dead of night or 3.00AM in the very genesis of morning, delete as appropriate.

Under cover of the shadowy gloom of this moonless night (or morning), I tip-toe out of the front garden and along the pavement towards a red car parked a short distance down the street. The driver, Ian Jenkins, is all set to take me to the remote and faraway destination of Anywherebuthereville.

Yes, you've guessed it. I'm running away from home.

Hah, this plan is mad, so mad. I hardly know the guy, yet here I am, sneaking away with him like some kind of desperate lovesick freak. Ah, but before you go thinking I'm a slutty skank or something, there's no romance or seediness involved. There wouldn't be. Ian is in his early thirties. By schoolgirl standards, this guy is bordering on ancient. And besides, my recent online posting of a spiteful untruth concerning a fellow pupil and somebody much older got me into this mess in the first place. Allowing history to repeat itself is not part of my immediate agenda.

In my heart, I don't want to run away. This is my home. It's where I belong. But recent events have left me with no choice. Disappearing without a trace is the only viable solution. With the idiot called Mallory Finch out of the picture, all the poor souls who have fallen victim to the crushing aftershock of my terrible, terrible lie will be free to heal their wounds and steer their fractured lives back on track again.

Then oh...

...I suddenly stop dead in my tracks. Something is holding me back. No, no, no, aborting my plan can't happen. I won't allow it. I close my eyes as tight as I can manage in a desperate attempt to relegate all guilt, fears and doubts concerning exactly what I'm leaving behind (my family, my home, my whole way of life) to the darkest recess of my mind. This is a difficult situation. My toughest decision ever. I must be strong. I must keep moving forward.

I. Must. Keep. Moving. Forward.

And then I'm on the move again, practically tip-toeing down the street, careful not to invite the threat of unwanted eyes behind twitching curtains. Nobody must see me leave. Nobody must know until after the event. Nobody.

At last, after what seems like a zillion years of soundless trekking, I reach my waiting method of escape. I open the passenger door, but pause once more, the annoying voice of reason attempting to quash my plans.

Ian picks up on my sudden hesitation. ‘Mallory, are you sure you want to do this? If you’ve changed your mind, you can always turn around and go home. Nobody will ever know.’

‘No,’ I respond, resolute, determined, climbing inside the vehicle and landing my rucksack in the footwell. In my mind, I tell myself, ‘Get lost, voice of reason, there is no going back now.’ And as I buckle up, I look at Ian and say, ‘We stick to the plan.’

Ian tips a nod. He sparks up the engine and puts the car into gear, gently pulling away so as not to wake the sleeping.

‘Ian, will you promise me one thing?’

He throws me a curious glance. ‘Sure.’

‘Promise me you won’t bring up what happened. What I did.’ I shudder at the thought of my recent sin. ‘This is a clean slate for me. A fresh new start. Please tell me you understand.’

He thinks about it, then replies, ‘I understand. And yes. I promise.’

My smile has gratitude written all over it.

As the vehicle gradually gathers pace, I peer over my shoulder, offering the street where I’ve lived my entire life one final farewell glance. Oh, God, this is so heartbreaking. I am truly remorseful for all the trouble I’ve caused. But even so, I doubt anybody in this town will be sorry to see me disappear into the night, into the unknown, into the deepest, darkest abyss of oblivion.

‘Good riddance to bad rubbish,’ that’s what they’ll all chant tomorrow morning, even my parents, yes, my own flesh and blood regarding the mysterious disappearance of Mallory Finch, public enemy number one.

#goodbyeforever