

## Lucas by Marisa Orton

### Lucas – a story

It's all gone wrong. Everything. Sometimes I just wish I could die, because there's nothing left for me here and part of me feels like I don't even deserve to be happy anymore. I hate what I've become. This monster. Caught up in drama, distracted by the people around me who don't actually care at all, pulled away from the family my world used to revolve around and so uninspired to write that I feel like my life is worth nothing.

I hate breaking rules! No matter how badly I've always wished for a life of adventure and spontaneity, that's not who I am. That's not who any part of me is. I feel like I'm forever torn between this raging desire burning in my flummoxed heart, and the intelligent aura that has always surrounded me.

I used to write all the time. It was my way of escaping, of being someone else, of disappearing into a world I loved. I could be anyone at all, which was all the excitement I really needed. Reality was a calm relaxation, because it wasn't the world I really existed in.

I was overjoyed when I wrote; my stories were my life.

Lately, I haven't had the will to lose myself in the beautiful paradigm of my imagination. Reality has sucked every last drop of energy from my body and I'm torn apart inside. My mind is a mad whirlwind of hatred and longing. My heart has been eaten up by itself and crushed into a thousand pieces.

When I sit down at my computer, I'm lost.

The one place that once held an infinite number of possibilities and extremes is where I now feel more dead than ever.

Dragging my feet to school in the morning, after a night of trying to do push-ups in my room, giving up because I realize I don't care what people think of the way I look, and then huddling up tight under the covers with an old pillow, I feel like Death. Literally. Part of me wonders whether I am actually capable of shooting daggers from my bloodshot eyes and casting an icy enough spell to make my acquaintances drop dead.

I hate making other people feel bad, so I stick to myself, head down as I pull my heavy feet up the stairs.

Someone calls out to me. 'Hey!'

Turning around sharply, my face lights up. I run a careless hand through my hair and start humming a song to myself. 'Hi, Ellie. What's up?'

My friend gives me a cheery hug and we discuss the latest gossip about people in our class, both of us giggling when the class representative comes up to us with a photo of our maths teacher on holiday.

'Who would ever have guessed teachers had lives outside the classroom?' says Ellie with a girly laugh. She's been spending a lot of time with her three sisters and you can see the pyjama-party memories gleaming in her eyes.

So I tease, 'should I be worried that Mrs. Pythagorus has a more interesting life than we do?'

We laugh, and as soon as some other kids show up, I pull my hood up over my head and disappear from the circle of people. I walk up the stairs quickly so no one can catch up to me; I love my friends, but I don't know how long I can keep on pretending I'm me.

Waiting outside our physics classroom, I pull my phone out of the back pocket of my plum-colored coat and check to see if anyone has sent me photos or messages on my favorite social network site.

No internet signal.

I pretend to look entranced by what I see on the screen all the same.

The most important person in my life is gone, and so is everything I used to love. If people just left me alone, it would be so much easier to act normal and not burden others with my problems.

The class materializes slowly around me, they come and talk to me, surround me, but I see none of them. Their voices are drowned out by the screaming in the boiling pits of my souls.

*Get out of here! You're not worth it! Escape before you realize what a monster you've become! Don't try to face yourself; you won't like what you see...*

'Ellie, awesome sweater,' I say, leaning on my friend's shoulder.

'So you admit I'm hotter than you today?' she grins. Ellie is always grinning; I'll say it's one of her many talents.

I elbow her teasingly. 'Even you can't possibly believe that's true.' I look over my shoulder and call out to our class's football star, Matt.

Yeah, there's one in every class. We're just a cliché macrocosm of society-it's not our fault.

Matt glances in my direction, but before he knows what's happening, I've caught his hands and we're dancing like two crazy teenagers trying to impress their friends at a nightclub. He's much taller than me, but I stand on my tiptoes and hold up our joined hands so he can spin me around in the centre of our crowd.

The class claps for us, as Matt calls over to Jenny Jones to hit us with a beat. When she starts beat-boxing, I throw her a pound coin through the air as I twirl through the crowds with the boy I've had less than three conversations with in all my life.

They're all cheering, but I don't know what any of them are saying. Theirs just voices in a seas of a billion drowning spirits.

For as far as I can see along the coastline, I am surrounded, so peacefully, by the oscillation of the sublime white sand and turquoise waves. Some would describe it as *picturesque*, for it is the sort of beach you never see outside of postcard pictures. *Surreal* is what others would, perhaps, say. After all, it is, at first glance, the place everyone dreams of-the place you draw, as children, not quite knowing it really exists.

*Run. Far, fast, from all of this, because you won't make it through. It's not getting any better and you know it. You're a poison bomb capable of destroying anyone you're close to if you start to bring them down. You're the problem. RUN. Run from yourself.*

Funnily enough, our teacher isn't surprised when she sees Matt and I monopolizing the corridor with our animated show. She knows us, and even if she will never admit it, she really is just like us at heart.

I throw my head back laughing as Matt spins me around one last time.

*Don't look up. The sky can't save you from what you are.*

Out of the corner of my eye, my gaze crosses Lucas's as he's coming up the stairs in a casual hurry. Late, but just on time. As usual.

I smile.

He blends in swiftly with the crowd, but stands out from a mile away. His eyes are shining, because this is Lucas and Lucas is a universe of his own.

Giving a background to the beach is a forest, which probably appears, from an omniscient view, rather like an indecisive forever-green cloud, hovering over the ground while deciding where to go next. Sunbeams are streaming out of the forest from in between trees and branches, sending light upon the white sand underfoot.

I see Lucas's paradise in his eyes, while all along he just stays there watching us, flashing me with a smile, his backpack slung over one shoulder.

'Miss, come on!' Matt throws into the mix, turning to our teacher, who was, otherwise peacefully, unlocking our classroom door. He lets go of my hands and links his arm through hers, which takes her utterly by surprise on the surface.

Heart racing, smile breaking across my face. The centre of attention left on the dance-floor, all alone. This just won't do.

Lucas doesn't move, but he knows it's him. He knows he's the one I'm watching, the one I'm imagining dancing with even before I pull him into the circle of ecstatic eleventh graders.

Our teacher just shakes her head, but she's laughing as she and Matt swirl through the masses. She winks at me as Lucas picks me up swiftly and spins me round in his arms like I'm a little kid, while the rest of the class is driven crazy by the wackiness of it all.

They love us. And we love them.

'You know I can't dance, right?' Lucas whispers in my ear as he sets me down with an artistic flourish.

The music continues, but we stop for just a moment. I take his hands, holding one and placing the other on my waist. The trust he has makes the whole thing simpler, and his smile-so easy-going and yet full of dangerous excitement that no one here can even fathom- makes me smile too, so we're both just standing there like beaming idiots.

'Now just go along with the music.'

Laughing, skipping, falling over each other's feet, spinning in dizzying circles, crashing into one another... We're a disaster. But at least we're an awesome disaster.

Everyone thinks we're in love. We've heard all the rumors-from friends with benefits, to distant cousins who have to hide their love for each other in order to

save their pride. Even when I date other people, there's always some trouble-seeker who brings up Lucas.

No one understands what we have; sometimes I don't even think we do.

I laugh when I'm with Lucas. I mean, really laugh. Neither of us really knows why, but we're just so damn funny that even saying hello is full of hilarity.

*If only he knew what you really are...*

Before I even know what's happening, I'm falling down, my shoe slides slides on a banana peel on the ground, I take a wrong step...Probably not in that order, but it all happens too fast for me to know or care what's going on.

Lucas isn't a morning person. He catches me, but it's too late, and in any case, I'm laughing too hard to have any strength left in my body. We both fall to the ground in a heap. A messy, embarrassing, dire, catastrophic, laughing heap.

He isn't all about that Prince Charming stuff. He's too busy being him to try being anyone else, and I think the fact that he is more concerned about barreling us both out of the way of the banana skin in order to keep our clothes from getting dirty than about catching me dramatically and heroically in front of everyone is one of the things I will always love most about him.

Miss Douglas shakes her head again; she has been stuck with our exasperating class since September. 'Time to start working now!' she calls, strictly but lovingly at the same time, as she pushes open the classroom door and lets us all inside.

Lucas stands up and gives me a hand pulling myself to my feet.

'I really need a new dance partner,' I say, brushing off my wrinkled t-shirt and jeans.

We're the last ones in the corridor. Alone in our own little world.

'Should have given me a lesson before dragging me out in front of everyone then,' he says, but he's outshining the world with that smile.

I elbow him in the ribs. 'Even lessons won't teach you basic coordination.'

He holds up his right hand like a little kid bursting with pride. 'Left.'

I put my left hand up what he believes to be his.

We both stop.

And I could swear his arms are around me even before I break down in tears.

Lying in bed at night, humming old-fashioned music to myself and listening to the other students run up and down the corridors of my strict boarding school building, I find myself enveloped in an incredible world of happenings I can barely explain. It takes my breath away, to the point where I can no longer breathe without tasting the scent of cinnamon on the tip of my tongue or open my eyes without seeing for miles over a stretch of land I'm literally dying to discover and disappear in the secrets of.

Lucas. My best friend, my accomplice, the beholder of my deepest secrets... I've only known him a few years and yet without even being told, he knows everything there is to know about me. He understands my terrible jokes, he laughs at things only the two of us could ever find amusing, he takes care of me when everything goes wrong. We never have serious discussions, and that's part of what I love about him; even when I'm huddled under my bedsheets shaking from head to toe as I wonder how I can possibly manage to kill myself and the entire world around me, one simple message from him can make me laugh. Heart-breaking topics turn into discussions about Batman within seconds. With him, nothing else matters.

Casual, cool, calm.

Rolling hills, crispy and glinted emerald, dancing like gentle waves under the morning sunlight. As they blend into the background, eventually disappearing into the distance, I let myself wonder what could possibly lie between their color-tinted collage of patterns.

He's calm, but he understands. In a way he's superior to normal people our age ; it's funny seeing him sitting in a classroom. He hasn't done any maths homework all year, and yet I don't have enough fingers to count the number of times he has talked to me right through the night when I've needed him most.

And his humor. He's funny-he's oh, so hilarious ! Neither of us have to make an effort to understand each other's humour; it's just natural.

Only once has he been angry at me. Only once did I lose absolutely everything I thought I was. He wasn't there -and no matter how strong a person I was, the ground dissolved and disintegrated beneath my feet. I saw him walk away-and inside, I died.

He has always been the one who makes me want to write; he found me years ago when I was a lost writer with nothing else in the world, when I was no longer able to distinguish Reality from Reality, when I barely spoke to anyone because I didn't know what I was doing on this Earth. Like it would be for a normal person to be occasionally trapped in a world that didn't really exist.

Fire. Roaring flames, illuminating the darkening sky as flashes of orange and red dart from side to side, playing, chasing one another around the wings of the fallen plane, like a thousand trapped souls in an alternate dimension. So close to us, and yet inaccessible. No one can save them, or perhaps no one knows they need to be freed, because from what we can see, they are freer than those of us watching them dance to and fro.

Lucas's wandering imagination found mine and I think we helped each other adapt to Reality. He made me realize what it was to be at home somewhere, to fall in love with a place, a concept, a person.

Without him, I can't put lives down on paper. I can't take that step into our world and let myself go. But between his creativity and my whimsy, we invent the most formidable stories anyone could ever create.

Everybody says I was born to write. But what's a writer without inspiration?

In another life, he is my whole world -my sun, my moon and my stars-and we both know it because we weren't really born into this universe. We're dreamers; we exist in an alternate dimension where none of the catastrophes in this world can touch us.

We're consequently late to class. Everyone asks questions, but people really aren't interested in the lives of those around them, and the general subconscious conclusion is that I had a nasty fall on that blasted banana peel. Lucas doesn't act like anything is wrong, and I love that he is such a mystery to the rest of the world.

He takes his seat next to his musician friend at the back of the class, while I am closer to the whiteboard, with Ellie, who hounds me with concerned remarks.

She's not like most people-easily superior to most souls I know. Ellie and I aren't friends-we're partners in crime, who are closer than sisters, friends or best friends ever could be. She's alarmed, because she's never seen me cry before, but I quickly swallow the lump in my throat and return to my usual self within a few seconds.

*You weren't like this before...*

'So what do you think of Mr. Harland's butt?' I ask out of pure curiosity.

Mr. Harland is our geography teacher who was probably good-looking about fifty years ago. Time, however, has been neither kind nor considerate towards the man.

Ellie laughs. She can tell I haven't been permanently damaged by the morning's trauma, even though she has no idea what it was about.

When Miss Douglas starts explaining the theory of relativity to our class, my thoughts start to drift away from my body, as if I, myself, am floating right out of the window.

Tonight, I'm going home. And I'm not sure how I'm going to face the destruction, because the truth is all I can do is sit there and try in vain to make things better; it's not like I can undone what has been done. Unfortunately, that's the only thing that could really help any of us right now. I'm helpless. Useless. Just another person tossed into the turmoil of suffering.

And no matter how hard I try not to be one of those people grieving-for his sake-I can't keep hiding the fact that I'm nothing now. I hate that I can't control myself anymore. I hate that I can't do what he would always have wanted me to do.

I feel the tears brimming in my eyes, my vision clouded by the despair of a thousand nights.

Suddenly, my phone, which has been a motionless weight in my pocket for days, vibrates against my leg, and I jump.

'Ooh,' says Ellie with a teasing smile, 'vibrations?'

I peer at the screen. There's one message waiting to be read.

Lucas: I'M BATMAAAN!

I turn to look at the back of the class, my heart subconsciously ceasing to beat as I wait to see him winking back at me.

*It's going to be okay...*

I lay eyes on his friend, on his table, on his seat.

And in a second, I'm hit with it all as if he just walked out in front of the drunk driver who took his life all over again.

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**Marisa Orton** is a passionate writer living in the south of France. She is bilingual and has recently taken to writing stories in both French and English. She is a high school student in an inspiring, mountainous village hidden in the secrets of the Unknown.

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