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He Had Her at "Hail Satan"

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He had her at “Hail Satan” – the prayer Matt yelled in the middle of St. Peter’s Square. He told Elizabeth about it at taco night in her Dublin apartment before she knew she had him. It was only funny because a bolt of lightning had struck a nearby rooftop right after his prayer. Elizabeth chuckled before biting into her taco.

She had him at “Pina Colada” – the drink she inhaled at the Mexican restaurant beside Dublin Business School. She drank one-fourth of the pitcher of Sangria after that because “why does it taste so good though?” He raised his eyebrows and grinned past his big lips. But she didn’t wonder if she had him until later when their three-hour class had ended and he waited for her downstairs. Then her friends Cici and Clarissa wondered.

He had her in that restaurant in Derry when he sat beside her and glared at her arch nemesis across the lunch table. His eyes blazed behind his glasses in a way murderous enough to be mistaken for love. They swiveled to her and said, “Who does Lexi think she is being a fucking douche to you?” She wondered if he knew how comfortable she felt inside their bubble of mutual hatred. She wondered if he knew to what degree he had her.

She had him in Fitzsimmons of Temple Bar when she was dizzy on wine and rum and coke and Heineken, when she looked at him the way that girls are supposed to look at guys. She knew she had his fuzzy brain as the night got older and the dance floor got lit. She had his glassy eyes when her teal hair tumbled down and she stood up. He had her when she didn’t like him but liked the way he looked at her. He had her when he didn’t know how to dance but did it anyway because “Is it too late now to say sorrrrrrryy? / I’m missing more than just your body.” She had him when she sat back down and locked eyes with him too many times for the giggling Cici not to notice.

“You guys should make out!” Cici yelled into Elizabeth’s ear over the bass from “Hotline Bling.”

Elizabeth laughed and yelled back, “I don’t even like him.” Cici shrugged and returned to being lit. Elizabeth peered up hazily to see Matt dancing like an idiot toward her booth. He sat. They stared at the flashing dance floor. He got up.

She didn’t know to what degree she had him, but she wanted his eyes on her so she
pre-gamed in Ryan’s apartment with him and whole squad that final Thursday and said nothing while he sat beside her and got up and sat beside her again. She didn’t go out with everyone, so she snapchatted him lies later on. “You know I like you a whole fucking lot, right?”

“Yeah.”

And he bought it and she bought it and she was confident enough in her feigned heterosexuality to act the part. “Why the fuck didn’t you tell me you liked me a month ago?” She figured she was angry so she hardened her words.

“Because I’m awkward,” Matt said.

But they’d wasted all this time and now study abroad would end tomorrow. She had him there in Cobblestone, smooshed between the bar and all the middle-aged Dubliners, so he bought her last pint of Guinness.

She had him when she said goodbye with downcast eyes because she had to get some sleep tonight. He said, “I have to finish packing, but you should come over when I leave here.”

She said, “Okay.”

She had him more than she knew she needed to have him, and she went over and they talked about the people they hated. And he sat on Chris’s empty bed and she moved across from him and told him to move beside her because “if we don’t make out, Cici will hate me.” She had him when he glanced down at her bare feet. And then his lips had hers and she knew she needed them then and never again. They were hesitant and untalented enough to make her feel safely grossed out. Her lips had his for longer than she wanted but long enough to make him think she wanted him. She knew he wanted her at a greater degree than she would ever want him when he asked her to stay, and that was her cue to leave.