

Chapter 1: The Very Beginning

Hello, my name is Melanie. Melanie Jo Moore if you want to be incredibly specific. I was born September twenty-second in the very small town of Nassawadox. Like any kid it took me a while to adjust to my name. My mother named me Melanie from *Gone With The Wind* and Jo from *Little Women*. (She read an awful lot.) After reading *Gone With The Wind* at the age of eleven, I realized my mother had made a terrible mistake; I wanted to be a Scarlett. How was I supposed to make in this world being named after Melanie, always nice to everyone, never saying anything mean? What kind of future did I have? I finally got over the initial Scarlett phase. I began to appreciate my name, though it would take many years to completely honor my namesake. It figures that just when you feel that you have made good with yourself and you begin to embrace your name, you find out that you have to defend it. After all, it is your name. No one else has it, and no one should call you something else. That's when everything changed.

I thought nothing of it at first. The more I look back now, the more I realize how many mistakes were made and how much I could have gotten away with. My first memory of this mix up was when my mother decided to have a birthday party for me at Pizza Hut. I was allowed to invite a few friends. The bonus of this event was that we all got to leave school early. We waited until our principal finally came over the loud speaker and announced that these specific students needed to report to the office for early dismissal. He read our names right down the line and then that's when he said, "and Melissa Moore." Well, of course, he must have been tongue tied. I had invited a friend named Melissa to come with us. My mother must have corrected him because he quickly came back on and said my name. Somewhere deep in some other class, Melissa Moore wondered why she was getting out of school early.

That's right, without my knowledge there was someone who had a name almost exactly like mine. Melissa Lynn Moore. A name that resembled my name enough that it would cause me grief for the rest of my days. The funny thing is that for a long time I never realized that she existed. I thought she was an administrative mistake. Things happened on and off for quite a while. My name would pop up on the absentee list when she was out of school. Finally, it occurred to me that she was actually real. A real person that was my age had almost stolen my name. I had plenty of time to build a grudge against her. She was the girl that tried to be me with her name.

Inevitably it happened at eighth grade open house. I wandered down the halls with my mom and my class schedule in hand, quickly chatting with friends here and there. We walked into my Civics classroom. Ms. Thompson sat at her desk talking to another mother and daughter. My mother stood patiently behind them awaiting our turn. I glanced at the rectangular tables in the classroom. We sat in groups of four at each table. Each table had a piece of paper taped to the front of each chair. The paper depicted who would sit where for each class period. I carefully studied each paper until I found the table with my name. Now, the hard part was who would be sitting at my table. Two names were

familiar. They were kids I had gone to school with since the first grade. The other was familiar in another way. The name burned my eyes like fire.

“Is that a seating chart?”

All I could do was nod at my mother.

“Well, who are you sitting with?”

I turned and looked at her. “Melissa Moore.”

As it always does, the first day of school came faster than it should have. Summer was moving behind us and fall was ready to take us on. My friends gathered at our bus stop. Soon thereafter, the bus was there to slowly move us along to Northampton Middle School. It was my first day of eighth grade and my last year of middle school. This year my class was the ‘top dog’ of our school. Next year we started all over again as freshman at high school. This was also the first day of my life with Melissa Moore.

We made our way through the halls, making plans to see friends at lunch. I finally filtered out of the hallway shuffle and into my first class of the day: Civics. There she was, Melissa Moore. She had bangs pulled back in a barrette. Her hair was darker than mine, though that hardly counted since I had been bleaching mine blonde all summer. She was so tiny. I sat down beside her and initially did not make eye contact. I unloaded my notebook and a pen from my bookbag. Once I arranged those items I glanced around the classroom for familiar faces. Then I watched Ms. Thompson scribble notes on the chalkboard. All this time I had thought about what I would say to Melissa Moore when I first met her. I had analyzed every word and every moment that I had spent resenting her and her name.

And then, I said nothing. She said nothing. Neither of us said anything. I couldn’t believe someone so small and so meek and so shy could be ruthless enough to steal your name from you. She never said a word the whole class. When the class was over, she loaded up her bookbag and silently went just as silently as she had sat there the whole time. How could someone who had a name so much like mine be so different from me? I was beginning to believe I was misnamed again. She was definitely a Melanie and I definitely had the markings of a Scarlett. I was loud and obnoxious and would say anything to get a rise out of people. She didn’t say anything.

It took several weeks for my shock to wear off and for Melissa to start opening up to me. Once I had her going, she never did shut up. Though I had her talking, I knew there was still a lot of work to do if this girl and I were going to live the rest of our school days being confused for one another. I knew that if I could tweak her personality just right, the real Melissa Moore would come out of her shell and that one brief class in the morning didn’t give me much time. Our teacher, Ms. Thompson didn’t help. She could tell that I was up to no good from a mile away.

I had begun a hellacious rebellion the year before. Teachers knew my type. I had hair that was bleached so blonde it was almost white. I wore make up that was way too old for my age. My clothes, well they screamed rebellion. I would flip-flop between wearing clothes that were too tight and wearing men’s clothes that were way too big. Most girls hated me and guys just didn’t know what to think. I had

already been in two fights and I wasn't afraid of making trouble for others. I had been sent to sit in the hall by several of my teachers. I either slept or doodled in class. At times my teachers doubted my chances of even passing the seventh grade. Not only had I corrupted myself, I was now working on a victim for a sidekick.

I don't know why Ms. Thompson never separated us. She had threatened to more times than all the students had fingers to count. She let us stay together. Melissa listened to my stories of Cape Charles, the town I lived in. She couldn't believe that we were all drinking and raising hell. Most of us weren't even in high school yet. I could tell that deep down she wanted in on the action. That was all in good time though.

Melissa's first taste of how ruthless my friends and I could be was on a field trip. It was a trip provided by the home economics class. Unfortunately you were required to take this class. A class, might I add, I almost failed for washing the dishes in the wrong order. The trip was to our local hospital. I can't remember the learning purpose of this trip, but the great thing was that Melissa and I were both going. The plot thickened horribly though. My best friend Tracy from Cape Charles was coming. Plus, Melissa's best friend Rhonda was coming too.

Now, Tracy was a fairly rebellious chick herself. Tracy had a lot of mouth and a lot of muscle to back it up. One of those that could talk the talk and walk the walk. Tracy was also a fair bit of a prankster. She played jokes on her family, on me, on anyone really. Rhonda on the other hand was a lot like Melissa. She was quiet, polite and very religious. Rhonda had already warned Melissa that it might not be in her best interest to hang out with me. She had heard stories about me and all those other people from Cape Charles. We were crazy people and were surely going to make Melissa do crazy things.

Melissa was very excited about this trip for one reason. There was this man who worked at the hospital who she had a big crush on, such a huge crush that she had found a Star Trek action figure that looked just him. She carried that action figure with her everywhere she went, including that day to the hospital. We finally convinced her that she needed to put him in her bookbag. It would be pretty embarrassing if this man she was stalking caught her with that toy. After kissing him square on the forehead, she placed her little Star Trek action figure in the back pocket of her bookbag. Yes, this was the eighth grade!

Once we arrived at the hospital, we trudged around in a single file line. Tracy and I picked up anything we could and wore it. You name it: surgical hats, surgical mask, gloves. Tracy suddenly elbowed me, she had her finger pressed close to her lips to silence me. With that same finger she pointed forward directly towards Melissa's bookbag. There he was. Her little Star Trek man was hanging out of the pocket of her bag. He looked like he was about to do a parachute jump from it. We carefully sped up and gently yanked him from her bag. She never had any idea he was gone until...

"Oh my god, where is he!" We were on the bus and on our way back to school. Melissa was tearing through her bookbag for her little toy man. "He was right here. He must have fallen out!"

"Melissa, what are you talking about?" I could barely get the sentence out without chuckling. She frantically dug through her bag deeper and deeper until she realized he really wasn't in the bag.

“We’ve got to go back! He’s at the hospital. I need my little guy!”

“Oh Melissa, get a grip. It’s a toy.”

For the rest of the day it was all she talked about. The missing Star Trek man was the only thing on her mind. My original intention was to give him back to her that afternoon, but it was just too funny to listen to her go on about him though. Then I figured on giving him back maybe at the end of the week. By then she had called the hospital and reported him missing. She was combing through every toy department in our area looking for a replica, but she could not find a replacement. I just wasn’t ready to give him up. Melissa finally stopped searching for him weeks later. She was awfully pitiful. Mr. Star Trek guy came to live with me in my memory box until I was ready to give him up.

Once again, right before eighth grade ended, I was reminded that for the rest of our lives we were burdened with each other’s name. We would never be individuals. We would never be two different people. Classmates who were confused by who was who to begin with were now completely lost. The 1994 edition of the Northampton Middle School yearbook came out and there we were side by side. Except she was Melanie and I was Melissa. Right then I knew there would never be hope for either of us again.

Besides that, eighth grade finally ended without a hitch. Melissa had miraculously changed over the course of that school year. She was much more open and so much more blunt about things. (I still blame some of this on her broken heart over losing the little toy man.) I felt she was ready for high school now. She had a chance. When we walked out of that middle school for the last time I wondered if we would still be close in the years to come. The only time we ever saw each other was in class and now we didn’t know if we would ever have that again. I was ready for summer though. The summer always had more mischievous troubles and longer nights. I was ready to spend my last summer before high school getting into as much mayhem as I had in the previous summers, if not more. I just hoped Melissa would not forget her new found self and the friendship we had built.

Melissa’s Eighth Grade Yearbook Entry To Me:

To Melanie:

Have fun this summer and do not get in trouble

like drinking, drugs, and breaking into stores.

Have fun! Do not forget me!

Melissa

Chapter 2: We Meet Again

As luck would have it, our stars did cross once again. Our freshman year of high school we had Geography together. The most ironic element was our Civics teacher Ms. Thompson had been transferred to the high school to teach Geography. Once again, Ms. Thompson was stuck with us for a whole school year. This year we had actual school desks and we sat right beside each other by choice. It was amazing how a year ago I was dreading sitting by Melissa in Ms. Thompson's class and now it was the highlight of my day.

The school system decided to do something new for our lunches that year. I don't know why, but the system decided that they wanted to keep a better track of what you bought for lunch every day. Every student was awarded a number. You could only use this number once a day and you had to enter into a keypad when you bought your lunch. The one other interesting fact is that these numbers were given to students in alphabetical order. My number was 2627 and Melissa's number was 2628. Usually we had the same lunch period though a few times a year we would have different ones due to exam schedules.

One of these exam schedule days I had first lunch and Melissa had second lunch. This was no ordinary lunch day. It was Chicken Nugget Day and Melissa absolutely would die for Chicken Nugget Day. I was standing in line with my tray of chicken nuggets about to enter my number when the evil plan hit me. I smiled at the lunch lady and entered a number that was not mine. 2628. I glanced over at the lunch lady's computer as 'Moore, Melissa 2628' flashed on the screen. I smiled at the lady, gave her my dollar and made my way to the lunch table. In less than one hour, Melissa would be in line, trying to get her beloved chicken nuggets and be denied. Yet another lesson on how painful friendships could be.

The school took yearbook pictures in late September that year. I hated taking yearbook pictures. The only reason I even smiled in that yearbook was because Karen and Tracy were saying obscene things behind my back. When I got to the front of the line a lady sitting at the desk asked for my name.

"What is your name?"

"Melanie Moore."

"Moore, Moore ..." She ran her finger down the list. "Oh, here you are. Melissa Moore."

"No, that's not me. I should be right before that. Melanie Moore."

"I see. That's cute that your mom named you guys alike."

"What?"

"Your names sound alike."

"Our moms don't even know each other."

“Oh, you guys aren’t like twin sisters? Just sounded like it with names like that. Melanie and Melissa Moore. Just like twins.”

Melissa’s presence in my life was wonderful that year. She was able to keep me sane through several troubling issues in my life. She was still my friend when I had a huge falling out with Tracy, who had been my best friend as far back as I could remember. She was there during the break up of two boyfriends that had meant the world to me at the time. (Not simultaneously, of course!) So it didn’t bother me when she started this horrible rumor that we were cousins. I owed it to her. We could be cousins, I guess. It was hard, but we played it off. We were related through our dads. Her dad was still in Delaware, her home state. That was our story. No one ever pried too deeply, which was a good thing. We never thought what we would say past that.

About the middle of the school year, the guidance office called you in one by one to drill you on your ideas for the future. When my turn came I was escorted in to Ms. Sturgis’ office. She was a tall woman. She seemed pleasant. The more I look back the more I know that she didn’t deserve the teenage rage I let out on her. I found it amusing at the time to totally run circles around members of the faculty.

“Ms. Moore, please sit. How are you today?”

“Okay.”

“Just okay?”

“Yes, just okay.”

“Well Melissa, my name is Ms. Sturigs and I am your guidance counselor.”

“That’s great Ms. Sturgis, but my name is Melanie.”

“Excuse me?”

“Melanie, I’m not Melissa.”

“Oh, it said here that your name is Melissa.”

“Yeah, so did our eighth grade yearbook.”

“I’m sorry, Melanie. Now that we have that straight, let’s talk more about you. What are your plans for the future?”

I gave her that ‘what are you talking about’ glance and then said bluntly, “what future?”

“After you finish high school, what college do you plan to attend?”

“None. I’m not going to college.”

I could tell that I couldn’t frustrate her easily. I was not the first person to walk through those guidance doors ready to throw a fight. “You aren’t planning on attending a college?”

“No ma’am, I don’t.”

“What are you planning to do after high school then, Melissa?”

“Melanie.”

“I’m sorry. Melanie.”

“I have a rough idea of what I will be doing after high school. I plan to move out of my parents’ house when I turn eighteen. I will of course need employment to be able to afford this so I plan on working at Hardee’s for my income.”

She was trying to see through my wall. I wasn’t going to let her though. I was ready to block her out as hard as I could. “Well that should be a nice job for right after school, but long term...”

“I think working at Hardee’s will be fine for long term, Ms. Sturgis.”

“You will not be able to succeed working at Hardee’s.”

“Sure I could, it’s even economical. At closing, they let the employees take home any food they don’t sell. I won’t even need to buy food for my house. I can just live off Hardee’s leftovers.”

“Ms. Moore, I see you have chosen photography as an elective this year. Do you enjoy photography?”

“Yes I do. Is that your way of avoiding calling me Melissa?”

“Melanie, would you like to work professionally in the line of photography?”

“Yeah, I would.” That was the big mistake, now Ms. Sturgis could see through my Hardee’s plot.

“Though, I don’t know where I will have time for professional photography being busy with my fast food schedule.”

“Well, Melanie, I think we have done everything we can here today. I will keep in touch with you. We will have at least one more talk this year.”

“Oh goodie! I’m very excited.” I stood up and marched out of guidance. How many times could that woman possibly call me Melissa? Geez.

When the yearbook came out, I was glad to see that the staff remembered who was who. I wasn’t sure the girl taking names was convinced that I wasn’t Melissa Moore. Our pictures were even on two different rows that year. There was a chance. Maybe one day our peers would realize we were two different people. Maybe.

This was the year that Melissa started dating Matt. I was glad Melissa had a man. At least one of us did. I was never good at holding down relationships. There she was though. Macking and attacking. She had her very own boyfriend. And I, well I had an occasional boyfriend for a few days at a time. They surprisingly stayed together for a very, very long time.

Summer vacation came and once again Melissa and I had to part our ways. We stayed in touch over the summer by phone though. We would have to be patient for a few months to see if we would be lucky enough to have classes together again when we were sophomores.

Our Ninth Grade Yearbook Entries To Each Other

From Melissa to Me:

(This was written in a spiral that kept getting smaller and smaller.)

Melanie, I've decided to write by Matt (his picture was to the left). Anyway, I hope that we do not having driving ed together. I'm writing like this to see how much you like it. I can't believe you wrote about Mark in my yearbook. How dare you. Anyway, we have had fun this year together being bad. I wonder if we will have Geo together next year. It would be the third year in a row. I hope that you and Steve will last after he goes to college, or wherever the hell he goes. You probably will if you both love each other. I just put my thumb on the word 'both'. Now you will have my thumbprint when I become famous. It will be worth A LOT of money. But we both know that will not happen. But I will tell you one thing, that after I graduate I am leaving this place for good. By that time, you and Steve will be married and have one child. Hope that you can read this, because I cannot. Do not get in trouble this year because the Moore name is a good name. We have to find out if we are related. We have to be somehow.

Have fun this summer,

Melissa Moore

From me to Melissa:

(also written in a spiral)

Melissa? Do you know how long this year has been cuz I had to deal with you? Eh, just as long as I am not in driver's ed with you I should be safe next year I guess. Well I hope you and Matt work out for the best. (Are you pretty glad you and Mark broke up?) Funny how you went out with Mark, then you go out with Matt because they are complete opposites that hate each other. Let's see, other problems? Oh, guidance decided that we were the same person. Well, you seem to be just about a sister now, since all we've been through. As I said, you and Matt belong together. Keep him or I'll kill you!

Still Smilin'

Melanie Moore

Chapter 3: The Birth of the Green Goose (GRN GOSE)

Our sophomore year came around and shocking news flash for us both, we had no classes together! Now we would have to purely rely on seeing each other in the halls, at assemblies, at pep rallies and at the occasional lunch. It was our first year in two years that we did not see each other for a whole class period during the day. We were still excited though because we knew a new world was about to open up to us right past our fingertips. That very soon we would be cooler people in the society of young people growing up. We would obtain one thing that would put us ahead of those younger than us. We would be getting our driver's licenses!

Melissa turned sixteen in January. I still had to wait patiently until September for my birthday. Melissa was the first person close to me in our grade to have her license. I was very excited about all of this. Melissa getting her license meant she could come see me and we could go places together. Just imagine how much hell we could get into when we weren't on school property. It was great. This was going to be great! Then reality struck me. Oh my God, Melissa behind the wheel of a motor vehicle. Not just the dinky simulator they make you drive in class. A real car that surely had the capability to do dangerous things when a dangerous person was behind the wheel. What I once thought was the life of me could very well have been the death of me. It took me a while but I finally got over the initial scare. Then the next thought occurring to me was equally scary. Getting our license of course wasn't as hard as the next task on hand. Getting a car. That's when Melissa's stepfather stepped in and made all our dreams (and nightmares) come true.

Now granted, it was not a new car. But it was new to Melissa. There it was. A 1977 faded green Delta 88. The car was so big you could not have dreamed of getting it in a normal car garage. It was so heavy that it may have outweighed an elephant. The hood was so long that an average size man could lie out on it. The trunk was certainly big enough to fit several bodies. It was built to seat six people very comfortably. The V8 roared loud enough that small children scattered for miles away. She was not your average sedan. This car was just bad ass. Its driver was probably less than 100 pounds, only 5'3" and wore a size 3 ½ shoe. Even though this car and Melissa were quite the odd couple at first glance, you knew they were soul mates after you had been a passenger.

It took a while to convince Melissa to come down to Cape Charles with her. (And to save up enough money to get the gas hog down there.) She had that car for quite a while before I was able to ride in it. I was only able to see it in the parking lot at school. My first time seeing it in action on the road was a gloomy afternoon. School was just let out and my Cape Charles gang and I were still waiting for our bus out front of the school. We chit-chatted about the day's events when I stopped in mid-sentence. I heard a goose. I shaded my eyes from the hazy glow of the sun. My friends stood there watching.

"Mel, what are you doing?"

"I heard a goose, I love geese." Then I heard it again.

HONK! HONK! HONK!

“Where the hell is it?” I mumbled. I turned towards the road in front of the school. Then I realized that it was no ordinary goose. “Holy shit! It was Melissa’s car! The damn thing sounded just like a goose!”

I called her as soon as I got home to break the news to her. Her big momma hoopdie had caused all of us to crack up the whole ride home. “It sounded like a goose Melissa, I swear. I was looking everywhere for a goose in the sky. And what did I find? A big damn green goose honking! Your car is just a big green goose!”

There was something catchy to the way green goose sounded. It was so catchy that Melissa scraped together the money to get personalized tags from DMV. I was so proud the day she showed me the back of her car with brand new sparkly plates that said ‘GRN GOSE’. I had named her ten ton beast. From there on out, everyone called her ‘the green goose’. The car was a legend even before it started its wild crazy days.

Several months later, I finally had the chance to experience the goose from inside the car. It was the last day of our sophomore year. June is a fairly hot month for us on the Shore. It is probably officially one of the first beach months even though you can sometimes go as early as April or May. We decided that we would leave our sophomore year behind us and celebrate it by going to a private beach that I knew of. After school, Melissa, Tracy, my sister and I loaded up in the green goose. We had all wore our bathing suits under our school clothes to save time. We left the school parking lot screaming and hollering with Melissa squealing the wheels. Once on the highway we were passing cars right and left. Melissa was a very fast driver. That’s when we noticed Nick’s truck in front of us. He had Joe in the truck with him. They were also rising juniors like we were. We flew by them, all of us flicking them off and yelling. After we had passed them I just blabbed out, “Someone should have mooned them.” That’s when Tracy started grinning.

“Melissa, get in the passing lane and slow down so they have to pass us on Tracy’s side.”

Melissa glanced in her rearview mirror at Tracy. “Are you really going to do it?”

“Hell yeah!”

Melissa did as instructed. She pulled to the left lane and slowed to a mere forty five miles an hour. When Nick and Joe crept up beside us they never even looked our way. They were trying to be cocky and it seemed they were sure that Melissa’s car was breaking down. They simultaneously looked over at us with huge smiles on their faces. Those faces quickly changed to open mouth jaw dropped shock. Staring right back at them was Tracy’s bare ass hanging out the window. Melissa honked the horn, reached over top of me to give them the finger one last time and hit the gas. The green goose soared away and left the two of them in amazement at what they had just seen.