

the  
dating  
games #3:

# Double Date

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Melody Carlson, *Double Date*  
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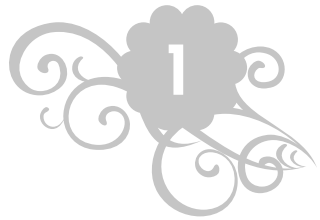
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By Monday morning, Cassidy Banks had some serious doubts about Felicia Ruez. She hated feeling like this, considering how much Emma seemed to like this girl and the fact that the Dating Games club (aka the DG) had recently voted to induct Felicia. Unfortunately, Cassidy's concerns over Felicia had to do with character issues. Or more specifically, Felicia's *reputation*. To be fair, Cassidy rarely paid attention to school gossip, but the stories she'd heard lately seemed to be jiving with this new image that Felicia was presenting.

Cassidy was the first to admit that of all the girls in the DG, she was by far the most conservative. Especially when it came to appearances. Thanks to her average good looks—her long, no-nonsense brown hair and brown eyes, her addiction to blue jeans and hoodies, and her general dislike of cosmetics—she knew she wasn't exactly a showstopper. Despite her low-maintenance beauty habits, it hadn't escaped her notice that

Felicia had recently undergone some kind of makeover—a redo that made Felicia look totally hot. Hot in a way that suggested this girl was going after some serious male attention.

Cassidy didn't get it. After all, Felicia had always been exceptionally pretty—Emma often compared her to Penelope Cruz—and in Cassidy's opinion Felicia did not need to wear sexy clothes or flashy hair and bold makeup to turn a guy's head. They were already looking.

This fact had been driven home in Cassidy's Algebra II class just this morning. Poor Marcus Zimmerman couldn't take his eyes off Felicia as he walked into the classroom, so much so that he didn't notice a stray chair in the aisle and wound up toppling right over it, causing the class to roar with laughter. Naturally, Marcus made a quick recovery, feigning a dramatic bow as if he'd purposely choreographed the whole thing for their entertainment.

Cassidy felt certain his accident was a result of Felicia's short-short skirt and low-cut top. She suspected it was just a matter of time before Felicia was called down to the dean's office and reminded of the school's rigid dress code. Northwood Academy had put an end to the dreaded school uniforms several years back, but as a result the dress code was firmly enforced. At least it used to be.

"We need to talk," Cassidy said quietly to Emma Parks, accosting her friend as she emerged from the restroom and pulling her aside.

Emma's blue eyes grew wide. "What? Are you breaking up with me?" she said in a teasing tone.

"Very funny." Cassidy lowered her voice. "So, did you talk to Felicia yet?"

"No, but I asked her to meet me in the cafeteria to—"

"Well, hold your horses."

"What?"

“I’ve changed my mind.”

“Huh?” Emma’s brow creased in confusion. “What d’ya mean?”

“I know we all voted to let Felicia into the DG last week,” Cassidy began quietly, “but I—”

“I already told Felicia to meet me at lunch today.” Emma pushed a strand of wavy blonde hair behind an ear.

“You need to cool your jets.” Cassidy tugged Emma away from what looked like overly interested ears.

“But Felicia is really hoping she’s in,” Emma persisted. “We need her in order to have an even number of girls for our whole double date—”

“Maybe so. But I am rescinding my vote.”

“Rescinding?” Emma frowned. “Meaning you’re backing down completely? You don’t want Felicia in the DG at all? *Ever?*”

“That’s right.” Cassidy glanced around to be sure no one could overhear her. “I have reasons to believe Felicia isn’t a good fit for the DG.”

“What kind of reasons?”

“I’ll tell the DG at lunch,” Cassidy said. “I just wanted to be sure you hadn’t given Felicia the green light yet.”

Emma looked skeptical. “You haven’t been listening to gossip, have you, Cass? That is so unlike you. But if you have, you better—”

“Hear me out at lunch, okay? I have to get to class now.” As Cassidy scurried away, she felt slightly guilty. Was she overreacting? What if the things she’d heard were wrong? But just as she thought this, she saw Felicia hurrying toward the English department. That little yellow skirt was so short that Cassidy felt certain Felicia would be unable to pick a pencil from the floor without exposing her rear end. Why in the world did Felicia think she needed to dress like that anyway? And why in

the world hadn't the dean of girls called Felicia into her office by now? What was this school coming to?



Despite her earlier concerns, Cassidy started doubting herself by the time lunch arrived. Was she being too hasty about Felicia? Too judgmental? Gossipy even? As she entered the cafeteria, she knew that she didn't want to be like that. She despised gossip and was usually outspoken about those who indulged in that kind of meanness. But at the same time, she felt strangely protective of the DG. She didn't miss the irony here since she, of all the girls, had been the most skeptical about a dating club in the beginning.

But after all they'd been through and the friendships the five girls had formed, she felt compelled to preserve the integrity of the DG. To that end, she set her brown bag lunch aside and pulled out her iPad, opening up the rules that they'd written in September. She was just perusing the document when the other girls started trickling up to their usual table.

### **Dating Game Club Rules**

1. We will honor the secret membership of the DG.
2. We will be loyal to our fellow DG members.
3. We will help fellow DG members to find dates with good guys.
4. We will report back to the DG regarding our dates.
5. We will not be jealous over a fellow DG member's boyfriend.
6. We will never steal a fellow DG member's boyfriend.
7. We will abstain from sex on our DG dates.
8. We will not lie to the DG about what happens on our dates.
9. We will never let a boyfriend come between DG members.
10. We will admit new DG members only by unanimous vote.

“Oh no,” Bryn said in a teasing tone. “Cass is reading the DG rules again. Time for another little lecture?”

“I don’t lecture anyone,” Cassidy retorted.

Emma set her tray down with a clunk and a frown. “Cass doesn’t want Felicia in the DG,” she chanted like a tattletale.

“I guess I’m just having second thoughts,” Cassidy clarified. “I rescinded my vote to buy us some time. We need to go over some things before we commit to another member.”

“But we already voted.” Bryn set her chef salad on the table, tossing her mane of long, sleek blonde hair over her shoulders as she primly took a seat. “Remember?”

“Yes, but Emma hasn’t *told* Felicia yet. I’m calling an emergency meeting before she does,” Cassidy informed them. “Any objections?”

“Not if you think it’s really necessary.” Bryn opened a packet of salad dressing.

“I do,” Cassidy declared. “Think about it. Does anyone here want to induct a member that we’ll regret later on?”

“Good point.” Abby focused on unwrapping her bean burrito. “I’d hate to have to kick someone out.”

“I have some questions about Felicia,” Cassidy said quietly.

“I do too.” Devon nodded eagerly as she opened a packet of ketchup.

“Really?” This was totally unexpected, but Cassidy tried to take it in stride. “Yeah . . . okay then. It’s obvious we need to discuss this.”

“Come on, you guys. What has poor Felicia done to deserve this kind of scrutiny?” Emma demanded. She pointed a finger at Cassidy. “Just so you know, I probably sounded like a stuck-up snob when I told her I couldn’t talk right now. Even though I was the one who asked her to meet with me. I could tell by her expression that she thinks I’m just jerking her chain, and I don’t blame her a bit. She probably won’t even want to join now.”

“So what’s going on exactly?” Abby narrowed her dark brown eyes at Cassidy. “Why should we have second thoughts about Felicia?”

“I have some concerns,” Cassidy stated carefully. “It’s partly about her appearance and part—”

“I know what this is,” Bryn taunted. “Cassidy and Devon are worried that Felicia’s too much competition.”

“That’s laughable.” Devon held her chin high as if to assure everyone that she had no concerns. And why should she? With her wavy auburn hair and curvy figure, she had no problem catching a male eye.

“And totally bogus.” Cassidy held up her iPad like it held evidence. “Here’s the deal. I don’t think Felicia will want to comply with our rules.”

“Which rules?” Abby asked with interest.

Cassidy scanned down the rules, stopping her finger on rule #7. “This one for starters.” She looked around uneasily. “I’m not sure we should be having this meeting right now . . . in public. Especially not here in the cafeteria.”

Emma leaned over, quietly reading the seventh rule loud enough for the others to hear. “We will abstain from sex on our DG dates.” Her brow creased as she peered at Cassidy. “What are you saying about Felicia?”

“I’m saying I have reason for concern.”

“Did Felicia tell you something that suggests that she can’t comply with this rule?” Abby asked pointedly.

“No. But I overheard some girls in choir last week. They were talking about Felicia and—”

“This is about gossip?” Abby’s dark brown eyes grew wide. “You of all people, Cass? You hate gossip.”

“I know.” Cassidy nodded contritely. “I do hate gossip, but it’s not just that. I’ve noticed some things about Felicia—the



way she's dressing and acting lately. Something has changed. Trust me, something's not right with that girl."

"I know exactly what Cassidy means," Devon declared. "Felicia is dressing just like a hooker."

"Really, Devon." Emma used a scolding tone. "You should talk."

Devon pursed her lips with angry eyes. "What are you insinuating?"

"Well . . . you *used* to dress like a hooker. Before we made you—"

"I cannot believe you'd say something like—"

"You know it's true. I still have some photos on my phone—"

"And I thought you were my friend!"

"Stop fighting." Cassidy held up a hand. "This is not why I brought this up right now."

"Are you trying to turn lunch into an official meeting?" Abby demanded. "Because I, for one, cannot do this. As soon as I finish eating, I need to get down to the gym to pick up my basketball uniform and get some—"

"This is the wrong place to talk about something like this," Bryn said. "If we need a real meeting, let's go to Costello's like we usually do."

"I agree," Devon said. "I move that we end this meeting."

"It's *not* a meeting," Cassidy pointed out.

"Whatever." Bryn tipped her head to a group of girls standing nearby who were looking at them curiously. "There are too many ears in here. Let's put a lid on it."

"What am I supposed to tell Felicia?" Emma asked.

"Tell her to *wait*," Cassidy urged. "Just until we can meet and get this thing settled."

"Can everyone make it at 5:00?" Bryn asked.

“I might be late,” Abby said with her mouth full. “We’re starting practice this week. We don’t usually quit until 5:00.”

“How about 5:30 then?” Cassidy suggested. “It can be a quick meeting.”

“You really think we need this?” Bryn demanded.

“I don’t,” Emma told her.

“I do,” Devon shot back at her. “Cassidy is absolutely right. I didn’t want to say anything, but I have some questions about Felicia too. I’ve heard stuff like what Cassie is saying. We need to know what we’re getting into . . . before we get into it.”

“Well, that’s very interesting, considering . . .” Bryn studied Devon with slightly narrowed eyes. “Hmm.”

Cassidy knew what Bryn was insinuating. She thought it was a little weird that Devon was speaking out against someone else’s character like this. Especially since Devon had come so close to being thrown out of the DG just a few days ago. Although Cassidy appreciated the moral support in her quest to protect the DG, it wasn’t too comforting that it only seemed to be coming from Devon. Siding with Devon on something like this was a bit disturbing.

Abby wadded up her napkin. “Okay then, I’ll do my best to get to this meeting by 5:30. But you better make it worth my time. I do trust you, Cass. You’re a fair person. I know you wouldn’t dis on Felicia just because of stupid gossip.”

“Or even just because of how Felicia dresses,” Bryn added. “Because, as you guys know, we all needed some wardrobe assistance when we started the club.” She tipped her head toward Cassidy. “You in particular, girlfriend, were not exactly what I’d call fashion forward, if you recall.”

The others laughed and Cassidy felt her cheeks grow warm as she started doubting herself again. Maybe she was wrong about Felicia. “Okay,” she said quietly. “I’ll try to gather as much

information as I can before we meet.” However, she had no idea how she was going to do this. What information?

“And I’ll help,” Devon promised.

“Great.” Bryn’s blue eyes twinkled with mischief. “I can’t wait to hear what you girls dig up on poor Felicia. Sounds juicy.”

“Bryn!” Emma glared at her. “I thought you *liked* Felicia.” She looked from face to face with a disappointed scowl. “I thought you all liked her.”

“I used to like her well enough,” Cassidy admitted. “But I don’t feel like I really know her anymore. It seems like she’s changed.”

“Well, I never knew Felicia before this year, but she doesn’t seem like the kind of girl the DG needs.” Devon sighed. “I know I don’t say this much, but I actually like how you guys kinda raised the bar on this whole dating thing. I know I don’t always act like it, but I appreciate that you have standards and morals. As you obviously know, I kinda need that in my life.”

“I care about the DG.” Abby stood up and reached for her bag. “As you all know, my dad’s not real thrilled with me dating in the first place. The DG’s my only hope. But not if it turns into something skanky. My dad would put the kibosh on that.”

“That’s true.” Bryn nodded. “He would. I guess we need to remember we’ve created something pretty special here. We need to be careful to keep it that way.” She smiled at Cassidy. “Thanks for making us slow down and really consider this.”

“I gotta go,” Abby said. “See you guys at 5:30.”

Emma seemed to soften as Abby left. “Yeah, maybe you’re right, Cass,” she said quietly. “We don’t want to do something we’ll regret. As hard as it might be to pass on Felicia, it would be even harder to have to kick her out later on down the line.”

“It could ruin the DG for everyone,” Bryn said.

“Cass and I will get this figured out,” Devon assured them. “We’ll bring the facts to everyone at 5:30.”

“I’ll just tell Felicia to hang . . . and that I’ll talk to her later.” Emma’s mouth twisted to one side. “I do hope you’re wrong about her, Cass. I really hope Felicia can be part of the DG. I think she needs us.”

Cassidy nodded as she bit into her apple. She didn’t want to admit it, but she was feeling uneasy and wondering if Emma might be right. Devon’s talk about going out to gather “facts” didn’t make her feel any better. How were they supposed to get facts when so far all Cassidy really had was a strong impression combined with what truly was only gossip? To pass judgment on Felicia based on such flimsy evidence . . . how fair was that?