

Praise for
Diary of a Teenage Girl: Maya

“Maya is a fun character! It’s not even possible to read *It’s a Green Thing* and not relate to her questions, her challenges, and her struggles as a teen and Christian. *And* I found myself jotting down her awesome eco-friendly tips!”

—JENNY B. JONES, award-winning author of *In Between* and *The Charmed Life* series

“As Maya Stark pours her heart out in her journal, readers are treated to an inside view of a life that is at times exotic and unfamiliar, and at other times hauntingly similar to our own. Maya’s struggles become our struggles, her pain our pain, and her successes, therefore, even sweeter. *A Not-So-Simple Life* is another triumph for Melody Carlson.”

—VIRGINIA SMITH, author of *Sincerely, Mayla* and *Stuck in the Middle*

“Fantastic book! Maya is so easy to like—this is a hard story to put down!”

—ERYNN MANGUM, author of *Miss Match*

“Melody Carlson has proven her skill once again at writing gritty stories about characters in difficult situations. In *A Not-So-Simple Life*, Maya Stark seeks to escape life under the controlling hand of

her drug-addicted mother by acting on a plan for independence with admirable determination.”

—MICHELLE BUCKMAN, author of *Maggie Come Lately*
and *My Beautiful Disaster*

“I just finished Melody’s book and loved it! The journal format makes the story, and Maya, so real and believable. Readers will easily be able to identify with the realistic approach to a prevalent situation.”

—PATRICIA RUSHFORD, author of the Max & Me Mysteries

Diary of a Teenage Girl

Maya book No. 3

What
Matters
Most

a novel

MELODY CARLSON



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

September 16

Is it possible that trouble just naturally follows some people? Or perhaps there's something about my "magnetic personality" that attracts negativity. Or as Caitlin would say, maybe God is at work on me. But seriously, sometimes a girl just needs a break.

Here's the deal. It's the third week of school, and I'm finally on fairly good terms with Brooke and Amanda, and Dominic and I are getting along okay, and my classes are going pretty well, and I've even made a few new friends. Things are looking up for Marissa, although she's still not out of the woods completely, but I'll get to that later.

So anyway, it almost seems like I can relax just a little—like maybe I can just breathe and enjoy a taste of the normal life (a life still fairly unfamiliar to me). And suddenly I find out that I've made an enemy. Not just any enemy either. The girl who's set her mean-girl sights on me is none other than Miss Popularity. Not that I'm into that kind of thing. But according to Brooke and Amanda, Vanessa Hartman is. And for whatever reason, Vanessa Hartman is also into making my life miserable. Yesterday I thought our little encounter was just an accident. I actually laughed when

she and her friends burst into the cafeteria with so much enthusiasm that they practically knocked me off my feet. Okay, I'll admit her apology sounded a little phony, and I thought I saw a glint of evil in her big blue eyes, but who am I to judge? Then today we had another "encounter." Only this one was a lot messier.

I was standing in the cashier's line, minding my own business and waiting to pay for my lunch, when something icy cold slid down my back. I jumped and turned around in time to see Vanessa looking surprised (maybe it was faux surprise).

"Oh, did I do that? I was trying to squeeze into line and lifted my tray up." She shook her head with dumb blond wonder. "And it just sort of tipped. Sorry."

Her friends were snickering, and I tried to shake ice off my back and pay for my lunch and get out of there as fast as possible to assess the damage.

"What's up with that girl?" I asked Brooke Marshall as I sat down next to her. I've been eating lunch with her and Amanda Groves lately. Although I'm sure we make a strange trio since both these girls are petite and preppy whereas I'm more into retro and almost a foot taller. "I mean, yesterday she practically knocked me down, and today she does this. I can't wait to see what's on tomorrow's agenda."

Brooke tried to blot the cold liquid out of my hoodie with a wad of napkins, but it was obvious I'd need to change. "It's okay," I told her. "I've got some work clothes in my car."

Brooke laughed as she tossed down the damp napkins. "It figures you'd keep your cool clothes in your car and dress like this for school."

"Well, Jacqueline's is known for stylish fashion, so I can't exactly show up in jeans." I peeled off my soggy hoodie. "And I can't go in wearing soda-soaked clothes either."

"I can't believe she really did that. And her apology...give me a break." Brooke rolled her eyes, then imitated Vanessa. "'*It sort of tipped. Sorry.*' I mean, how does something 'sort of' tip?"

"Conveniently down your back," added Amanda.

Now Dominic Walsh was joining us. I smiled up at him, thinking, not for the first time, that he has the dreamiest blue eyes—such a contrast to his dark hair. "Hi, ladies." He set down his tray and slid next to me.

"Did you see what Vanessa just did to Maya?" Amanda demanded.

He nodded. "And it was pretty low."

"Seriously, I wonder what's wrong with that girl?" Brooke asked.

"I know what's wrong." Dominic smiled knowingly.

"What?" I asked him. "What is her problem?"

"You mean besides being a little too full of herself?" He touched the back of my soggy shirt and made a face. "Yuck. That's sticky."

"It figures she spilled a soda with sugar in it," Amanda said. "I'll bet she normally drinks diet too."

"So you agree that it was premeditated?" I asked Dominic.

"That's my guess," he said.

"But why? I hardly even know her." I glanced over to where Vanessa was sitting with friends—a lot of friends. In a way, she reminded me of a queen holding court. "I mean, she's in a couple of my classes. In choir she even smiled at me. I actually thought she was kind of nice."

"That's what she *wants* you to think," Amanda said.

"That's what she wants everyone to think," Brooke said. "But beneath her nicey-nice veneer, she's really a witch."

"That's a little harsh," I countered. "I mean, the soda spill *might've* been an accident."

"I don't think so," Dominic said with a knowing look.

"Then tell me why."

"You know who Wyatt Cooper is, right?"

"Yeah. He's in my AP history. He seems like a nice guy."

"And he thinks the same about you."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Dominic frowned slightly. "He thinks you're hot, Maya."

I just shrugged. "So?"

"So," declared Brooke, "*that* explains everything."

"How?"

Amanda nodded. "Mystery solved."

"Can someone please tell me what you guys are talking about?"

"Okay, let's bring her up to date," Brooke said. "Vanessa and Wyatt went together for the past couple of years."

"They were like the perfect couple," Amanda explained. "You know, the ones who act like they rule the entire school, like they think they should be called King Wyatt and Queen Vanessa—and they get crowned for homecoming or prom or wherever crowns are being handed out."

"Do you get it now?" Brooke asked with some impatience.

"Not exactly. But go on." Okay, I suppose I knew what they were suggesting. But it seemed a little presumptuous. I mean, can't a guy be nice just because he wants to be nice? Why does it have to mean something more? Why do people jump to the worst conclusions?

"The happy couple broke up this summer." Amanda glanced over to Vanessa's table. "And my guess is that Wyatt broke up with her."

"Not that we'll ever know," added Brooke.

"So now that Wyatt is into you, Vanessa probably wants you dead," declared Amanda.

"Great." I sighed.

"It might help your situation if they thought you and Dominic were still dating," Brooke suggested.

I gave Dominic a halfhearted smile. "Well, we're not, are we, Dominic?"

"That's right. We're just friends."

And that's what we've agreed to be. Just friends. Oh, I told Dominic that I'd consider going out with him again but only if we made some sort of agreement about our physical relationship

first. And I've been so distracted with school and visiting Marissa and my newspaper column ("It's a Green Thing") and the TV spot and occasionally working at Jacqueline's...well, I just haven't given the idea of dating Dominic that much thought. In fact, I like it better that we're just friends. I'm just not sure if he's happy about it. But Brooke or Amanda would love to date him. I'm not sure how I'd feel about that. Mostly I'm not thinking about it.

However, I did enjoy telling Marissa this whole story when I visited her at the hospital today. Although I don't think she quite got it (or maybe she did—it's hard to tell), she did seem to enjoy hearing it. Of course, she always seems happy to see me. She doesn't get that many visitors now. Part of the reason is because a lot of kids (like my cousin Kim) have gone off to college. But I think the rest of the reason is because it's hard seeing her like that.

As a result of the car wreck, Marissa suffered some fairly severe brain damage. She's doing a lot of therapy, and the doctor says her language skills will probably return eventually but she will never be the same person.

"Maybe it's for the best," Brooke said when I shared that news with youth group last Saturday night.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"Well, Marissa was pretty wild. Maybe this will settle her—"

"I can't believe you would say that!" I shot back at her.

Fortunately Caitlin intervened. A good thing, since I felt like smacking Brooke just then. I mean, I've been really trying to get along with her, but cracks like that... Well, I come kind of unglued.

Marissa was wild, and I know she made some incredibly stupid choices—like drinking and driving—but there was a part of her wild side that I actually liked. I enjoyed her wit and her sarcastic humor. I liked that she wasn't afraid to speak her mind or question Christians who weren't acting much like Christians. Those characteristics never really bothered me at all. And I always imagined her eventually finding God—on her terms...or maybe on His. I'm not even sure. But I always thought she'd make a cool Christian.

And now...well, I'm sure she'll still make a cool Christian. But she has changed. I miss the old Marissa. Still, I'm committed to being her friend, and I will continue to visit her. And who knows? Maybe the doctor is wrong. Maybe she'll get back her language skills and her personality too. Because really, why wouldn't God want Marissa to have her personality back? Anyway, that's what I'm praying for. Chloe and Caitlin and several others are praying for the same thing. We want Marissa back. But we also want her to give her heart to God. And we think it could happen.

September 18

Today I met with Mrs. King, the guidance counselor at Harrison High, to establish what year in school this should be for me. Because of my lack of transcripts from previous schooling—although I gave myself grades during my homeschooling era—my status as a student needs to be determined.

"Of course, you're aware," she began, "that you weren't even required to attend public school once you acquired your GED."

"I know..."

"But I'm glad you decided to come back here." She smiled.

"I think Harrison High needs you."

I tried not to frown. "I'm not sure everyone agrees."

She looked surprised. "Why not?"

"Nothing—never mind." I waved my hand in dismissal. Why had I said that?

But she just chuckled. "Yes, I'm sure it won't be all smooth sailing, Maya. It never is. But like my dad used to tell me, what doesn't kill you will make you stronger."

I nodded. "Yes, I've heard that one."

"So..." She flipped through my file. "Based on the academic testing we did last year before you took the GED, you could easily make this your senior year. But based on your age"—she peered curiously at me—"this should be your junior year. Which do you want it to be?"

"It's my choice?"

"For the most part...since your case is rather exceptional. I assume you're still working on your emancipation?"

I gave her a quick update on my parents and how I was staying with my uncle for the time being. "My mother's appeal is at the end of the month," I said. "From what I've heard, there's a good chance she could be released. My dad said it wasn't so much due to her being proven innocent as to the overcrowded situation in California state prisons. And I suppose her attorney is pretty good too."

"So what does that mean for you, Maya?"

"I'm not totally sure. My dad hasn't had time to petition the courts for my custody yet. And to be honest, I don't really want him to. I mean, I've been taking care of myself for a while now. I think I'd like to continue that way. Plus he'll be out of the country for about six months anyway."

"Does your mother still have legal custody?"

"According to the law. But based on her criminal record, along with what I've managed to put together toward my emancipation, I think a judge would rule in my favor."

She nodded. "I think you're right, Maya. And if there's anything I can do to help your case, please feel free to ask."

I thanked her, and then we returned to the question of what year this should be for me.

"What do you really want, Maya?"

I thought carefully. "I'm not sure."

"I understand. But we should get this figured out, especially if you want to be a senior. You'll have to jump through certain hoops if you want to graduate in the spring—I mean, with a Harrison High School diploma and not just a GED or state degree."

So I asked her to explain the difference, and she told me that a diploma from Harrison would be much more impressive on my transcript than a GED or even a state diploma. "And I assume you will want to go to college?"

I nodded eagerly.

"And based on the testing we did last spring, I assume you'll want to go to a good college. I have a strong suspicion we can get some scholarship funds coming your way, which is just one more reason to determine whether this is your junior or senior year."

"What do you recommend?"

Her brow creased. "I think you're the only one who can answer that, Maya."

"Yes." I sighed. "I guess I should pray about it."

"That sounds wise. And if you could let me know by next week—especially if you want this to be your senior year—I would appreciate it."

I thanked her and left. But now I'm unsure. A part of me feels like I've barely gotten into a real school, like this is my first shot at a somewhat "normal" life. What if just one year isn't enough? But another part of me feels like maybe it will be more than enough. Like when I think about the juvenile games some high school kids play—like Vanessa Hartman plays. But I don't want to think about that right now. At the moment I'd rather think about whether I'm a junior or a senior this year. I've given myself the weekend to figure it out. I plan to e-mail Kim about it. And I'll talk to Caitlin on Saturday. Most importantly, I plan to pray about it. I want to know what God wants me to do. That's what matters most.

Maya's Green Tip for the Day

Even in September most people are still using air conditioning. I've mentioned before that it's a good idea to turn your AC up a couple of degrees and save a few bucks as well as some energy. But here's another way to keep your cool—and it doesn't involve electricity. You can cool yourself off internally by drinking cold tea, lemonade, or water. Not only will you conserve energy (since all the cooling power is directed straight at your body's core rather than at the air), but you'll stay hydrated as well.