

Geraldine Malone

### **I've Got Nothin'**

*"We are always getting ready to live but never living."  
~~Ralph Waldo Emerson*

As an admitted over-analyzer, I recognize my body insecurities were inflated with too much learned material. More than likely, my teenage years would have been easier had I toned down my overactive thoughts and straightforwardly shared them. Unfortunately, I'm twenty-five and still trying to understand how I've let those years control my entire life.

I'll confess. I'm a hypochondriac. I've always had a flare for words, but the diagnosis I concocted for myself during my ninth grade biology class really takes the cake. After learning about chromosomes, genetic mutations, and syndromes, I prematurely labeled myself with Turners Syndrome. Girls with this syndrome and I, at least in my distorted self-image, shared a few key traits: short stature, little to no breasts, and the inability to menstruate. Not that I wanted to be classified with a disorder, but I saw this as an instant explanation for why I was not maturing.

But then, logic and reason kicked in. If it hadn't been for the fact that I finally cleared the five feet mark the summer before, I would have asked my parents to bring me for testing. Girls with Turners Syndrome definitely didn't reach five feet.

As quickly as my premature diagnosis flew into my thoughts, I abandoned it and found it easy to laugh at myself for even considering I could have had Turners. But, it wasn't long before the hypochondriac wheels in my brain churned another cause for my delayed growth. Perhaps it was due to overexertion. I did play a lot of sports and kept

myself busy morning till night with advanced classes, in addition to a grueling, year round extracurricular schedule.

I was tired, tired of looking younger than my age and simply not being able to wear clothes from the Juniors' department. Adults constantly questioned my age, something I was told time and time again I would appreciate, as I got older, but at fourteen, this only added to my insecurity. I knew these were trivial concerns in the grand scheme of life, but nevertheless, I felt alone and oddly different from my peers. I wanted some justification for why I wasn't physically changing, even if I had to try on a slue of far-fetched scenarios like Turners.

All parts of my physical growth were delayed, but each school year I held fast to the idea that *this* would be the year I'd catch up. I couldn't help but compare myself and wonder. By the time I was fifteen and entering tenth grade, I still hadn't begun menstruating. I *still* had nothin'. I'd all but given up hope for my biological clock to kick in when my mom took me to the gynecologist. She was more than concerned. In a way, I felt adult-like missing school for a gyno appointment, but this wasn't something to which I truly looked forward. Honestly, I was a bit scared, but I complied because I needed to know what was wrong with me.

After having blood work drawn and my pituitary levels tested, it turned out that nothing was abnormal. Now, I found myself a tad disappointed. Yet, I was administered a small prescription of progesterone to onset menstruation, and at last, I had an answer-- sort of-- to temporarily appease my endless thoughts.

Doing well in school was the one thing that could suspend my self-analysis. I couldn't imagine how unbearable my school years would have been if I didn't meet the

status quo for normal in at least one category of teenagehood. In many respects I surpassed “normal” and made up for my deficits with my academics.

My honors English class, run by quirky Ms. M, was an eclectic mix of students, all looking to upstage everyone else in the class. I thrived in this element. Yet all the entertainment provided by that class still left room for the I’m-so-perfect, Mr. Popularity to nonchalantly insult my body and me for anyone in our radius to hear.

“You know, you’re pretty flat.”

An entire row of gawking kids looked me up and down, snickering off to the side. My worst fears were actualized. I wanted to crawl into myself and die. It was one thing for me to agonize over my body, but now I felt as if he’d exposed me to my peers.

“Shut up.”

As if I didn’t already know, that was the best I could snap back. It wasn’t a very strong defense, what were my options? Should I have made a scene in the middle of class? Told the teacher? Those worked so well in past instances. To this day, I don’t think he said his remark to be malicious but more so to serve as a general testament to his attention-seeking, fifteen-year-old mentality. However, at the time, I could have killed *him*. And although we were generally friendly in and out of class, his hurtful, off-the-cuff comment always resonated in my thoughts—even today.

I had nothin’, literally nothing, up top, but I wouldn’t dare stuff my bra. I had to change for gym in front of my female peers, and the last thing I wanted to do was add fuel to the rumor mill’s fire. Besides, it would be extremely obvious to go from having nothing to something. Lying low and working hard were my remedies for not drawing attention to my body. These tactics seemed to work---well, for the most part.

I tried to exude confidence in myself. And it seems I must have done a fine enough job. But deep down, I walked around everyday with a cloud hanging over me. I had friends and respect and frequently delivered the punch line of the joke, but I never completely felt comfortable. It was hard enough to internally battle my own thoughts and insecurities, but I couldn't bear hearing my thoughts leave a classmate's mouth, not again. That would have about killed *me*.

At a time in life when fitting in and feeling accepted was everything, I felt that having nothin' meant I wasn't worth much of anything. Although my body eventually caught up (in college), I see that I had so much to offer back then, as I do now. I can analyze myself to death, but I know it won't be long until I've moved on to my next incessant idea. Woe is me. This is my life.