A Harper's Education

By : Think Pink

A sexually charged look into the lives of the privileged high school students at Harper's Preparatory. A modern-day tragedy, this story touches on the intimate details of high school struggles while weaving together a cast of characters whose actions lead to disaster. Please note, this is nothing like my previous novel, Screaming in the Silence. There will be sexually explicit scenes and violence so I have classified it as erotica even though it may be considered more of a young adult themed piece. New chapters will be arriving nearly every day so please excuse me if I don't update everyone who comments. Much Love, Pink

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A Harper's Education : Chapter 1

The music was loud and the bass was pounding through Laila's body.ï¿½Her new roommate had dressed her up, dragged her to the party and forced her on the dance floor.ï¿½Not that Laila minded the distraction, but she had never been to a party like this before.ï¿½Her parents would never have allowed it and, if they knew the faculty at the expensive preparatory school she now attended had all but turned a blind eye to such behavior, she would certainly be shipped back to California on the next flight out of Boston.ï¿½But parent's weekend wasn't for another couple of months and Laila was determined to take not full, but at least partial advantage of her new found freedom.ï¿½ï¿½

She looked around the crowded basement.ï¿½Nothing looked familiar.ï¿½The gothic architecture of the building, the blue and gold colors of the school, even the students looked different with their expensive clothes and their plastic cups filled with booze.ï¿½

"Let me tell you who's who," Tennille offered, smiling at her roommate, seeing the confusion on her face.ï¿½

Laila smiled and nodded, standing by Tennille's side as she started to point out people in the crowd.

"That guy over there, the one with leather jacket and black hair, that's Julian Polk, kind of the leader of the popular crowd here.ï¿½The blonde girl standing next to him is Kalyn Andretti, his sometimes girlfriend, soon to be fiancï¿½e unless he impregnates someone else before graduation."

"Wait," Laila laughed.ï¿½"Why is she his soon to be fiancï¿½e if she's only his sometimes girlfriend?"

Tennille laughed as well.ï¿½"Welcome to Harper's, girl, where old money means old tradition.ï¿½Kalyn's family and Julian's go way back.ï¿½They aren't allowed to call it an arranged marriage, but that's essentially what it is."

Laila's eyes grew wide with excitement.ï¿½"Are you serious?"

"Hmmm, afraid so," Tennille said with a sly smile.ï¿½"Pretty archaic, don't you think?"

Laila's head nodded in disbelief.ï¿½Her friends back home were going to love the stories she would have for them.ï¿½They had all warned her what going to an east coast school would entail, but even their imaginations didn't stretch this far.ï¿½

"Okay, so who else is here?"

"That guy standing next to Julian, staring at you like you're a perfect piece of filet mignon, that's Chase."

"Oh, disgusting!"ï¿½Laila laughed as she caught sight of the person Tennille was talking about.ï¿½His tall, lanky figure was slouched at the shoulders and his eyes looked red and swollen even from across the room.ï¿½His chestnut hair was slicked back and his tongue ran over his pale lips as he stared at the two girls.ï¿½

"Chase gets away with almost everything because his parents donate an obscene amount of money to the school every year.ï¿½His sense of entitlement reaches beyond school rules and into the female population, although he usually ends up with Julian's left-overs.

"Now, on the other side of the spectrum," Tennille continued, taking Laila's hand and spinning her around, "are the ones you don't have to look out for.ï¿½The kid sitting alone in the corner, the one with red hair, that's Randy.ï¿½He's one of two seniors here on scholarship, which means he doesn't have many friends."

"Who's the other one?"ï¿½

"That would be yours truly." Tennille smiled proudly.ï¿½"Although, I've managed to stay under the radar of ridicule for the past three years."

"Yeah?ï¿½How did that happen?"ï¿½

"I believe it has something to do with the fact that I'm almost a novelty at this school.ï¿½Harper's was eager to impress the board with a new music prodigy and it was just an added bonus that she was, how they put it, culturally diverse."ï¿½

Laila hadn't noticed before, but looking around she quickly realized how similar the student body really was, a drastic change from the last school she attended.ï¿½

"Look," Tennille brought Laila's attention back to the lesson at hand, and pointed to the stairs.ï¿½Three figures, all of whom looked little more like shadows in the dark light of the basement, were entering the room.ï¿½Their steps were slow and confident as they walked into sight and they appeared not to notice the sideways glances and longing gazes of half the senior girls.ï¿½

The boy in the front stood tall, his dark hair and dark brows towering over the rest of the student body.ï¿½His eyes were searching the crowd for someone or something.ï¿½Two blondes came in behind him, their ashy hair picking up all the colors of the strobe lights.ï¿½The closer of the two had a wide grin on his face, his dimples showing for the world to see.ï¿½But his twin brother looked more somber, his eyes fixated on the crowd with an unusual sense of calm considering the present environment.ï¿½

"Who are they?"

"Hands off the dark haired one, he's mine," Tennille laughed and waved her hand in the air.ï¿½The boy with the dark hair gave her a crooked smile and pushed his way through the crowd.ï¿½

"You made it!"ï¿½

"I told you I would be here," he said in a deep voice as Tennille threw her arms around his neck to kiss him.ï¿½It wasn't indecent or prolonged, but it made Laila blush.

"Tate, this is my new roommate, Laila."

Tate extended his hand for Laila's.ï¿½"Welcome to Harper's Prep," he said with a bow.

"Thank you," Laila smiled.ï¿½

"And this is Alistair and Sterling," Tennille said, making the last of the introductions before returning her attention to Tate.

"Laila, what a beautiful name," the cheerier of the blonde twins took her hand and brought it gently to his lips.ï¿½"I'm Alistair, the more handsome of the Pierce twins."

His brother rolled his eyes behind Alistair's back.ï¿½Laila smiled at his dimples.ï¿½"You two look identical to me," she admitted.ï¿½

"Almost, but not quite," Alistair continued without showing signs of offense.ï¿½

"How am I supposed to tell the difference?"

"Sterling's got the crazy eyes.ï¿½I've got the dimples."ï¿½Alistair smiled at Laila again, before becoming distracted by a group of girls dancing only a few feet away.ï¿½"If you'll excuse me..."

Laila turned to watch him leave, impressed by his confidence and ease.ï¿½She turned back to his brother, a little disappointed to find Tennille and Tate dancing in what appeared to be a world of their own.ï¿½

"So, I guess it's just you and me," Sterling said and Laila's heart nearly flipped inside of her chest.ï¿½His voice, unlike his twin brother's, was deep and silky.ï¿½Laila looked up at him.ï¿½Although not as tall as Tate, he still towered over her short frame.ï¿½His complexion was flawless, his skin appeared tan from the summer sun, and his short, ashen hair was pushed messily away from his eyes, making him look the epitome of disheveled perfection.

"I guess so," Laila smiled at him, unsure of what to think.ï¿½He appeared so harmless when broken down to the basics: blonde hair, athletic build, simple blue button up shirt paired with expensive jeans.ï¿½But something about him was mysterious, almost brooding.ï¿½Maybe it only seemed that way because she had yet to see him smile.ï¿½

Laila was struggling, trying to find something interesting to say to Sterling when she felt a tap on her shoulder.ï¿½

"Hey," the scratchy voice said from behind her.ï¿½She turned around and forced a smile when she saw Julian and his friend Chase.ï¿½

"You're new here, aren't you?" Julian asked, chewing on a piece of gum while he spoke.

"Yeah.ï¿½I mean, yes, I am."ï¿½Laila's California syntax and speech were proving hard to get rid of.

"I'm Julian.ï¿½This is Chase," he said, taking her hand and kissing it, much like Alistair had done.ï¿½But unlike Alistair's innocent touch, Laila felt Julian's tongue run between her knuckles, his fingers tightening around hers.ï¿½She pulled her hand away, softly, but with enough force to break free.ï¿½ï¿½ï¿½

"I'm Laila.ï¿½It's nice to meet you."ï¿½She nodded at each of them, rubbing the back of her hand against her side, suddenly incredibly uncomfortable under Chase's constant stare and Julian's playfully devilish grin.ï¿½

"Where did you come from?"ï¿½Julian asked her, disregarding her attempt at pleasantries.ï¿½

"San Francisco, California."

"Surprise, surprise," she heard a voice from her side say with a whiny drawl.ï¿½Kalyn and another girl stepped in beside Julian.ï¿½"A blonde with blue eyes from California.ï¿½I'm guessing she's a democrat as well."

The smile faded from Laila's face as she looked at Kalyn.ï¿½The girl was near perfection with her teased and highlighted hair, her makeup applied flawlessly and her dress most likely designer.ï¿½

"It must be an uncommon thing around these parts, I suppose."ï¿½Laila said before she could stop herself.

"What?ï¿½Democrats?"ï¿½Kalyn laughed and Julian smirked.

"No.ï¿½Natural blondes."

Laila heard Sterling laugh from behind her and was surprised when Julian and Chase laughed as well.ï¿½Kalyn glared at her, probably not used to being spoken down to.ï¿½The two girls stared at each other for a moment, Kalyn seething with an embarrassed contempt, Laila's heart racing at her bold move.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Julian asked, taking a step toward her and reaching for her waist.ï¿½Kalyn scoffed and turned away, dragging her friend by the hand toward the exit.ï¿½

"No, I'm fine, thank you," Laila replied quickly, stepping back and running into Sterling's chest.ï¿½

"Are you sure?"ï¿½Julian looked at her through narrow eyes, glancing only once at Sterling who had, until now, remained silent.

"She said she's fine."ï¿½Sterling put a hand around Laila's thin arm, taking a few steps back and pulling her with him.ï¿½"We were just about to sit down before you interrupted us."

Sterling suppressed a laugh as Julian glared at him.ï¿½But he wasn't worried about Julian.ï¿½He had, on more than one occasion, with and without the help of his brother, put Julian in his place.ï¿½No, Sterling was more concerned about the look that Chase was still giving the new girl.ï¿½His eyes had never left her, raking over her body as if she were a mannequin at a store.

Sterling put an arm around Laila's ribs, turning her around and walking in the other direction.ï¿½He glanced behind him only once to see Julian motioning for Chase to follow him to the spiked punch bowl.ï¿½His friend's head nodded as if he understood but he stood as still as a statue, watching Laila walk away, until the people on the dance floor filled in the space between them.ï¿½

"Thank you for that."ï¿½Sterling's attention was taken away from the two guys behind him to the pretty girl still tucked closely to his side.ï¿½Take that back, she was gorgeous.ï¿½And not gorgeous like the other girls at the school who, even though they may have been born unfortunate looking, had enough money to hide behind artificial features and expensive make up.ï¿½She was naturally beautiful with long strawberry blonde hair that flowed to the middle of her back.ï¿½Her features were small and delicate, her nose turned up slightly at the end to give her a childlike demeanor, and her perfectly bowed lips were deliciously full and pink.ï¿½

"You're welcome," Sterling had to remind himself to answer her.ï¿½"I imagine you'll want to form your own opinions about the rest of the students here, but those two really aren't the type of guys you want to hang around with."

"I figured as much," Laila said, shivering slightly as she remembered how Julian's tongue had felt on her skin.ï¿½"They were pretty creepy."

Sterling led her over to a table and pulled out a chair for her.ï¿½He couldn't help but smile at her words and thought she might be the only girl in the school not to fall for Julian's slick lines.

"Chivalrous, are we?"ï¿½Laila smiled up at him as he held the chair, waiting for her to sit down.ï¿½

"It might be considered chivalry on the west coast, but here we call it being a gentleman."

Laila giggled and the sound filled Sterling's ears like the soft music of a harp.ï¿½He sat down, trying to keep his composure in the company of this girl who had his heart skipping beets and his fingers aching to touch her skin.ï¿½He looked around the room, noting the whispers and glances from the groups of students still dancing.ï¿½Word had probably spread throughout the class that Laila had stood up to Kalyn and Sterling didn't envy her the gossip she was now subjected to.ï¿½Nor did he look forward to the retaliation which was certain to follow.ï¿½Luckily, Laila would be naï¿½ve to the butterfly effect she had created, at least for now, for she couldn't possibly understand the unwritten rules which governed the social lives of Harper's students.ï¿½

He looked back at her, her arms were folded on the table and she was leaning into them, stretching closer to him.ï¿½Her eyes were fixated on his and a curious look was on her pixie-like face.ï¿½

"You're staring," Sterling reminded her.ï¿½Not that he minded.

"Sorry," she smiled and her entire face lit up.ï¿½"It's just that when your brother said you had the 'crazy eyes,' I didn't understand what he meant.ï¿½But now, it's incredibly obvious."

Sterling let her stare for a moment longer.ï¿½He used to be self-conscious about his eyes, unsure of how to react when people commented on them.ï¿½But now he had grown accustomed to people staring at his eyes instead of into them.ï¿½It was uncommon but not unheard of for people to be born with two different colored irises.ï¿½The dark blue of his left eye contrasted brightly with the light green of his right, but in the dimly lit basement, he wasn't surprised it had taken Laila this long to notice.ï¿½

"They're beautifully peculiar," he heard her say softly as her gaze danced between the two colors, before meeting his.ï¿½

"You're one to talk," he smiled at her and saw the blush rise in her cheeks.ï¿½She looked away and smiled.ï¿½

"No, no, no.ï¿½You saw mine, now let me see yours," he teased as he reached for her face, turning it back to his.ï¿½

Laila laughed but opened her eyes wide to let him examine her.ï¿½He held her chin in his hand as he moved his face closer to hers.ï¿½Her skin was burning from where he was touching her and she caught herself holding her breath.ï¿½

"Kalyn called them blue, but they aren't.ï¿½Are they?"

"I'm impressed you're able to tell the difference in this light."

"Well, now that I've noticed, it's becoming increasingly difficult to look away," Sterling smiled at her and her pale cheeks blushed again.ï¿½

"Violet eyes are far less common than what I have."ï¿½He spoke and watched as her long lashes blinked in what seemed like slow motion.ï¿½Did this girl have any idea what she was doing to him?ï¿½He glanced down at her lips which were seductively pouted and he couldn't stop himself from running his thumb over their plump fullness.ï¿½But the second he touched her pink mouth, she pulled away from him and sat back in her chair.

"I'm sorry," he said quickly.ï¿½"I didn't mean to..."

"You don't need to apologize," Laila interrupted him.ï¿½He was relieved to see amusement in her expression rather than disgust.ï¿½"You just surprised me, that's all."

"So, California?"ï¿½Sterling quickly changed the subject.ï¿½

"California," Laila admitted, almost as she was embarrassed by it.

"What brings you all the way to Harper's?"

"I want to go to Yale.ï¿½More students from Harper's Prep are admitted than any other private school on the east coast.ï¿½And certainly more than any on the west coast."

Sterling smiled.ï¿½Both of his parents were Yale Alumnus and he had never imagined going anywhere else for college.ï¿½Alistair, on the other hand, had dreams of a big city and had greatly upset their parents when he announced he was applying to Harvard and NYU.ï¿½Yale was his backup.ï¿½But he didn't want to make Laila aware of any of this just yet.ï¿½He was determined to learn more about her first.

"Did you go to a private school in San Francisco?"

"I did.ï¿½Not a boarding school, like this one, but it was private."

"Let me guess, an all girls Catholic school?"

Laila frowned.ï¿½Was it that obvious?ï¿½"Yes."

Sterling laughed.ï¿½"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."

"It wasn't that bad," she insisted.ï¿½

"Well, I think you'll be just fine here.ï¿½Keep flinging the insults at the likes of Kalyn Andretti and you'll be famous in no time."

"She's not going to let that one go, is she?"

"Probably not.ï¿½But I wouldn't worry too much about it.ï¿½She's harmless unless you're susceptible to catty comments and gossip."

Laila smiled but she didn't know if she was immune to those things.ï¿½Her last school had been so small compared to Harper's.ï¿½There were only 35 other girls in her class, not enough to distinguish between the popular and the losers.ï¿½But it was clearly different here in Massachusetts, where the money was as old as the prejudices.ï¿½Her parents were well off and more concerned with her attending her senior year across the country than the minimal damage Harper's steep tuition would do to their bank account.ï¿½But their money was nothing compared to the wealth of the other Harper parents.ï¿½She had Googled some of the alumni after her transfer had been accepted and was shocked at the names she recognized.ï¿½

She was brought back to her new reality by the smooth sound of Sterling's voice.ï¿½"Laila, would you like to dance?"

She smiled but glanced at the dance floor.ï¿½The majority of people were dancing close, arms and legs tangled, hips grinding against hips, breasts pressed to chests.ï¿½She didn't know how to dance like that and was embarrassed at the thought of even trying.ï¿½

"I'm not a very good dancer, Sterling.ï¿½I've never even been to..."

"Wait!" he cut her off, an excited grin on his face.ï¿½"Don't tell me this is your first dance."

"It's not.ï¿½I've been to dances before.ï¿½Very chaperoned, very sober dances."

He laughed and she had to smile.ï¿½His brother had the dimples, but Sterling's smile was in a league of its own.ï¿½When his mouth smiled, his entire face followed suit, radiating happiness to anyone who was within range.ï¿½

"Come on, then.ï¿½I'll ease you into it."

Reluctantly, Laila stood up as Sterling reached for her hand.ï¿½He led her to the dance floor and smiled as she looked around uncomfortably.ï¿½

"Just look at me," he leaned in and whispered into her ear as he put his hands on her hips and pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her back.ï¿½She leaned into his arms as she raised her head to look at him.ï¿½Her violet eyes were smoldering, their golden center nearly on fire as her pupils dilated at his touch.ï¿½

Sterling knew she was innocent, this tiny girl now wrapped comfortably in his arms, but he didn't care.ï¿½He didn't want to take any of that innocence from her, it seemed to be the part he enjoyed the most, the part he envied her. ï¿½But as she became more comfortable with the music, as she began to move against his body and circle her hips into his groin, he could only think about how much he wanted her.ï¿½Oh, the things he could do to her at that moment.ï¿½He looked down his chest to where her soft breasts were pressed.ï¿½Her tight dress had produced just the right amount of cleavage and now they were swelling as he pulled her closer to him.ï¿½He imagined what it would be like to kiss her bubblegum lips, nip down her neck and then finally take one of her perfectly formed breasts in his mouth.ï¿½

He felt himself stirring as he let his daydream play inside his head.ï¿½Blood was already rushing to areas he wished it wouldn't, but he was hoping Laila would be too inexperienced to notice what was happening.ï¿½Without giving her any warning, he spun her around and pulled her backside into his hips.ï¿½He felt her hesitate and was scared he had gone too far too fast.ï¿½

Laila couldn't believe what was happening.ï¿½Her body was reacting to Sterling in ways she never knew existed.ï¿½The heat between them was incredible and his touch was causing her to ache in areas she was embarrassed to talk about.ï¿½When he spun her around and pressed himself against her back, she had been surprised to feel something stiff beneath his jeans.ï¿½She could feel everything through the thin fabric of her dress and her imagination ran wild.ï¿½She had never felt a boy so aroused before, and certainly had never been the cause of such arousal.ï¿½

Her body quickly fell back in time with his and she pressed her derriere against his groin with a sensual circle of her hips.ï¿½She heard him groan behind her as his hands moved from her sides and across her stomach.ï¿½One of his hands continued up her body, sliding up her ribs and lightly grazing her breast as he moved up to her neck.ï¿½She felt her hair being brushed to the side as his warm breath spread onto her skin.ï¿½She reached up and ran her fingers through his hair, encouraging him to come closer.ï¿½His hand had returned to her hip and was clenching her dress between his fingers when she finally felt his lips on her neck.ï¿½She tilted her head to the side, allowing him more access.ï¿½

The loud, pulsating music was nothing compared to Laila's heart.ï¿½She could feel it pounding in her chest as Sterling showered her neck with rough, demanding kisses.ï¿½She had forgotten where she was, forgotten that anyone was around aside from the person behind her holding her unbearably close.ï¿½She didn't stop to think

about how she should be acting in front of her new classmates, didn't stop to remember she was supposed to be making a good impression.ï¿½No, as soon as Sterling's hand started to move up her stomach to cup her breast in his palm, she turned to face him, pulling his face to hers and kissing him, releasing all the tension they had built during the dance.ï¿½

Sterling didn't have to think about what was happening.ï¿½His body reacted instantly to Laila's kiss, his hands pulling her close, his tongue gliding over her sweet lips.ï¿½Her mouth opened in response to his, his tongue instantly searching for hers, softly circling and massaging when he found it.ï¿½She tasted so good to him, like strawberries.ï¿½His teeth grazed her bottom lip as he positioned himself for another kiss.ï¿½But as he leaned in, he couldn't find her.ï¿½

Sterling opened his eyes to see Laila with her fingers to her lips, a worried expression on her face.ï¿½

"I'm so sorry," she said, taking him completely by surprise.ï¿½"I never act like this.ï¿½I don't know what came over me."

She was speaking quickly, making her unnecessary excuse as she started to back away from his embrace.ï¿½But he held her tight, not ready to let her leave.ï¿½

"I don't either," he smiled at her reassuringly.ï¿½"We were caught up in the moment.ï¿½No harm done."

"I should go," she said, putting a hand on his chest and pushing him away.ï¿½

"Laila, you don't need to leave.ï¿½It was just a kiss.ï¿½An amazingly sexy kiss," he added quickly when he saw the excited sparkle leave her eyes.ï¿½"One that I will be dreaming about tonight and hoping to repeat the next time I see you."

Her face reddened and she looked away, checking to see if anyone had seen them.ï¿½But all the couples on the dance floor seemed to be caught up in their own erotic foreplay, some even more indecent than she and Sterling had just been.ï¿½

"I'm just not the type of girl who...ï¿½I should go," she repeated, taking a few steps away from him even though her body was yearning to be pressed against his once again.

He caught her hand before she could run away from him.ï¿½"I can tell you aren't that type of girl.ï¿½And that is what makes you even more enticing than you were before."

She blinked her large violet eyes at him a few times before speaking.ï¿½His words had clearly caught her by surprise.ï¿½"I'll see you later, Sterling."

"At least let me walk you back to your room."

But Laila shook her head and smiled at him.ï¿½"Goodnight."

She dropped her hand from his and pushed through the people, skipping up the stairs and disappearing from sight.ï¿½Sterling smiled to himself and bit his bottom lip where he could still taste her.ï¿½Yes, he would be seeing her later but probably earlier than she had imagined.ï¿½Scanning the crowd, he found his brother talking to Rebecca Valencourt.ï¿½Alistair had broken her heart numerous times before, but she always came back to him, understanding he wouldn't want anything more than a few raunchy nights together.ï¿½Sterling used to feel bad for the girl, but after so many years, she should have learned her lesson.ï¿½Tonight, however, he was actually glad to see the two of them together.ï¿½Rebecca was a sure thing for Alistair, and a brilliant

excuse for why Sterling couldn't share a room with his brother that evening.ï¿½All he had to do now, was sit back and wait for them to slip away to the dormitories, hanging the red tie on the door, letting Sterling know he needed to find a different room to sleep in.ï¿½

Chapter 2: You're Deplorable

Laila let out a muffled cry of excitement as soon as she closed the door to her dorm room. The smile hadn't left her face since she walked out on Sterling. She was embarrassed by how she had acted, reprimanding herself for losing control, but she was also incredibly turned on by how good Sterling had felt. He was so strong, she could tell from the way he held her, the effortless way he had spun her around and pulled her into his chest.

Reaching for her nightstand, she brought her inhaler to her lips and pressed the medication into her lungs. The tightness in her chest eased almost instantly and she took a few deep breaths. She could still feel his hands on her hips, still taste his mouth on her tongue. Although she didn't want to, she knew she would be feeling him all night unless she took a shower.

She unzipped her black dress, shrugging it from her shoulders and letting it fall to the ground. Her pink robe was wrapped around her before she stepped out of her panties and heals, exchanging them for a pair of plastic shower sandals. She had been here for two days already, but things still seemed foreign. She didn't like sharing a shower with the rest of the girls on her floor, even though there were more than enough stalls to go around. She felt lucky to have a roommate as great at Tennille, but missed the privacy of her own room as well.

Laila peered down from behind her door, glad to find the darkened hallway empty of students. She walked quickly to the showers, opening the door quietly and slipping inside. She chose the last stall, utterly aware of the fact her silhouette would be visible from behind the textured glass.

The warm water felt good against her skin, washing away the indecency of the night's activities. Her eyes closed as she rinsed her hair. Tennille had wanted her to wear it straight and begged Laila to let her use the flattening iron on it, but without product, her natural wave came back as soon as the steam from the shower reached her head.

"Did you see how Sterling Pierce was carrying on with Tennille's new roommate?" A whiny voice interrupted Laila's peace.

"Jealous, Kalyn?" A second voice teased.

"Hardly," Kalyn replied, not too convincingly.

"Julian seemed to notice her, too," a third voice chimed in.

"Yes, well, Julian notices anything with boobs and a vagina. If he weren't so damn hot and rich, I would have given up on him a long time ago."

The three girls laughed and Laila waited to see if they would say anything else.

"But seriously, who does she think she is?" Kalyn asked her friends, her words sounding as if her mouth was full of toothpaste. "I mean, she just shows up our senior year, hell-bent on being a bitch?"

"You were the one who started it," one of the girls said.

"Whatever, Tasha. She's just some ugly, west coast hippy, with bad hair and an inflated ego."

The three of them laughed and Laila sighed, arguing with her better sense on if she wanted to turn off the shower and confront the girls. But she didn't have time to make up her mind. The laughter faded and the door closed behind them. Laila turned off the water as soon as she was sure they had left and stepped out of the stall, grabbing her robe and pulling it around her.

She took her time flossing and brushing her teeth, trying not to let Kalyn's words hurt her. But looking in the mirror, she couldn't help cursing her reflection. Her light eyes looked dead without make up on her blonde eyelashes. Her skin was so pale it was almost translucent and her body was too thin for her liking. But sports were hard for her to play with her asthma and she was stuck with Yoga or Pilates to keep healthy, and a limited diet to keep her figure from ballooning.

Laila walked back to her room, convincing herself that she was better than Kalyn and her friends. She closed and locked the door behind her, resisting an urge to call her mom and beg a plane ticket home.

"You can do this, Laila." Yale is worth it.

"You can do what?"

Laila jumped and screamed as a deep voice spoke from behind her.

"Darn it, Sterling! You scared me half to death."

"Sorry," he smiled at her, not looking apologetic at all. He had changed, exchanging his jeans and button up dress shirt for a plain white tee and flannel pajama pants. The short sleeves of his t-shirt showed his strong arms which would undoubtedly look even better if she could see his chest and abs as well.

"How did you get in here?"

"You left the door unlocked."

She did, didn't she? "Well, please leave."

Sterling took a few steps toward her and stared down into her eyes. "Alistair laid claim to the room tonight. I've got nowhere else to go."

"What about Tate's room?"

"Where do you think Tennille is?"

"Is his roommate going to let himself into my room as well?"

Sterling laughed. "Matt, I'm sure, has his own backup room. You'll find that on the weekends, no one really stays with their designated roommates."

"And you just assumed my room would be the best place to crash for the night?"

"I always stay here. Tennille had her own room for most of last year after the roommate was expelled for sleeping with her math teacher. And since she was always in Tate's room, I was able to come and go as I pleased." Sterling took a few more steps in Laila's direction, reaching for the belt of her robe and twirling it through his fingers. She was shocked and slightly disturbed at the ease with which Sterling spoke about student faculty relations.

"As you've already noticed, I'm sure, Tennille has a new roommate who most definitely doesn't want strange guys staying with her."

"Most definitely?" Sterling smiled down Laila's beautiful face. She was trying to be determined but failing miserably. He could see the lust behind her violet eyes and knew he wouldn't have to try hard to convince her to let him stay.

"Don't make fun, I'm still getting used to the way you talk out here."

His hand rose to her face and brushed some of the damp hair from her eyes, tucking it behind her ear. "I like the way you speak. It's endearing."

"Look, Sterling," Laila said, turning away from his hand and walking across the room. "It's bad enough what happened in the basement earlier tonight. I don't need you sleeping in my room to start any more rumors about me."

"Did someone say something to you?"

"I heard Kalyn and some of her friends talking about us in the bathroom." She bent over and opened her dresser drawer, the back of her robe riding up her thighs far enough for Sterling to get an almost indecent look at her legs.

"Is there an us already?" Sterling smiled at her back and sat down on her bed.

"They were mostly talking about me, I guess," Laila said, turning back around, a pair of purple shorts and matching cotton top clutched in her hand.

"Did they call you ugly and poor?"

"An ugly, west coast hippy with bad hair and an inflated ego."

Sterling laughed out loud and shook his head. "Kalyn's just jealous. Everyone who isn't her friend is either ugly or poor. She probably didn't like the attention Julian was giving you, either. "

"That's what I keep telling myself. But I really don't need to make any enemies right now. This year's going to be hard enough as it is." She stood awkwardly beside her bed.

"Just ignore her. She'll leave you aloneâ ¦eventually."

Laila smiled and stared into his eyes. She never thought she would feel comfortable standing in front of a boy with no make-up and no clothes on, but that is exactly how she felt with Sterling. His eyes were calming and his voice was soothing, his body language was unobtrusive and almost inviting.

"I need to change," Laila said almost shyly.

"Okay," Sterling grinned at her.

Laila waited for him to turn around or close his eyes but the seconds ticking away on the clock above her door seemed to take forever to pass.

"Are you waiting for something?"

"You think?" Laila retorted, her hands on her hips.

Sterling looked proud of himself as he turned around and put a hand over his eyes. Shaking her head at his cockiness, Laila waited before stripping off her robe, wanting to make sure he wasn't going to surprise her and turn around. But he didn't and she had to smile, believing he was truly a gentleman. She pulled her shorts and tank top on quickly before throwing back the covers of her bed and sliding underneath them.

"Okay, you can turn around now."

Sterling turned toward her and opened his eyes. She couldn't believe it had taken her as long as it had to notice them. They were entrancing, impossible to look away from. Everything about him was that way, though, and she couldn't even begin to control the butterflies that were taking over her stomach. But that was probably a normal way to feel, she imagined. Having never spent much time around boys her age, she probably would react to any male attention this way. Or perhaps not. Julian and Chase's attention didn't seem to produce the same reaction in her.

"Your eyes look beautiful right now," Sterling said softly as he started to crawl his way up her bed.

"I never wear purple outside my bedroom. It's my favorite color but it causes too many questions." Why was she telling him these things? It didn't make sense, but she wanted him to know everything about her; she wanted to know everything about him.

"Funny, same thing happens to me when I wear purple. But I imagine the questions aren't the same." Sterling grinned at her and she laughed, not so much from his joke but more from the awkwardness of the situation he was creating. She wanted him to kiss her again, but she didn't want him to come any closer. He was on her bed. What would he expect from her if she let him kiss her right now?

"You should go to Tennille's bed, now. I'm ready to turn the lights out."

Sterling looked shocked. "I can't sleep in her bed."

"Yes you can," Laila answered him, not wanting to hear his reasons why not.

"I could, I suppose, but I don't want to. I don't want to for the same reasons I would never sleep in Alistair's bed or Tate's. I know what goes on between the sheets."

"Okay, gross." Laila couldn't help herself. Scenes from CSI Miami with black lights and obscene amount of semen flashed through her mind.

"Exactly. So, you couldn't possibly make me sleep there."

"You'll have to sleep on top of the covers then. You aren't sleeping with me."

But Sterling was already pulling back the sheets on the other side of the bed. "Come on. This is a queen. You won't even notice I'm here."

"Nope," Laila pulled the sheets away from his hand and wrapped them around her. "You're lucky I'm letting you stay here at all. I could call campus security and have you removed."

"You really aren't going to let me sleep with you?"

"Not tonight, I'm not."

Had he heard her correctly? Her eyes were playful but he could tell she was nervous and uncomfortable with the idea of him sleeping in the same bed as her. Not tonight could mean sometime soon and Sterling wasn't going to ruin his chances by pushing his luck with her that night. He lifted himself onto his knees, looking down at her as she sat against the headboard. He could, he knew, ask her for one thing he knew she wanted to give him.

"Can I ask for a goodnight kiss, then?"

Her pale cheeks blushed pink. He had never seen a girl blush as much as she did and he loved it. He smiled as he watched her expression change from shock to delight at his request. Slowly, she sat up and rolled onto her knees, her small body gracefully moving closer to his. He saw the sheets drop from around her waist and knew she was wearing only a pair of incredibly short pajama bottoms beneath, but he didn't look down. He didn't want her to think he was after anything other than her heart.

Her top teeth grazed seductively over her bottom lip as she walked on her knees to meet him in the center of the bed. His smile widened as she approached, as did hers, both of them filled with anticipation and longing. Sterling kept his hands down at his sides until she was merely centimeters from him.

"Close your eyes," he whispered, taking her face in his hands.

Her eyes narrowed before she complied, her lips pulling tight and then relaxing as she waited for his kiss. He held her in anticipation, staring at her beautiful face for a few seconds before lowering his lips to hers. He softly kissed first one corner of her mouth and then the other before covering her lips entirely with his. His kiss remained gentle from start to finish, his tongue lightly tasting her lips before searching for hers. Their tongues danced together in a slow, incisive way as they kissed again and again, neither ready for the other to pull away.

"Wow," Laila breathed against his lips when their kiss finally did end. Her eyes were still closed and her lips were red and slightly swollen.

"My feelings exactly," Sterling grinned as he opened his eyes to look at her.

She took a deep breath and smiled as she opened her eyes. "No one has ever kissed me like that."

"I've never kissed anyone like that before," he admitted, trying to remember the last time he actually put effort into a kiss.

Laila gave him a disbelieving look and laughed, sitting on the bed and sliding under the covers. "Goodnight Sterling. For real this time."

"For real?" He teased her as he stepped off the bed and turned off the lights.

"Whatever, go to bed." She laughed in the darkness.

"As if," he countered.

He heard her gasp at the insult as he drew back only the top quilt of Tennille's bed.

"You're deplorable," she yawned.

"Now you're getting it," he yawned as well, then closed his eyes and replayed their last kiss in his mind again and again until he had fallen asleep.

Chapter 3: Morning Wood

Sterling woke up to Laila's light breathing. He rolled onto his side and stared at her from across the room. Her head was resting gently on her pillow, her strawberry blonde waves flowing over everything they touched. Her lips were parted slightly, a faint smile resting on the corners. Sterling didn't want to, but he knew he had to get up. Glancing at the clock on the wall, he already knew Alistair and he would be late to meet their parents. But that didn't faze him. Last night had been worth it. Waking up to Laila's perfect face, undisturbed and wonderfully peaceful, was excuse enough not to set an alarm clock.

He slid out of the bed, quiet as a whisper, and made his way to Laila's desk. The girl already had her books organized and her notebooks assigned. Purple Post-its were carefully lined up, telling her exactly where to go and what to bring her first day of class. He picked up a pen and jotted a note for her, silently removing it from the pad and pressing it to her nightstand before he left the room.

You look beautiful in the morning. I can't wait to see you againâ ¦

Sterling passed only a few people on his walk back to his dormitory that morning. Most were girls, doing their walk of shame, mascara smeared on their face, shoes in their hands. When he finally made it to his room, he lifted the tie from the door knob and let himself in.

Alistair was lying on his back, his arms behind his head, a crooked smile on his face and his eyes closed. But as he heard the door shut, his eyes flew open and he began to scramble to the head of his bed.

"Jesus, man! What the fuck do you think the tie is for?"

Sterling looked at the bottom of the bed and saw two manicured feet sliding under the covers to stay out of sight.

"Still? It's 9 in the morning and you two have had all night."

Alistair gave him a guilty grin. "Morning wood," he said with a casual shrug of his shoulders. "She offered to take care of it for me."

"Alistair, you're such an asshole!" Rebecca's familiar voice came from under the covers of his bed.

"Good morning, Rebecca." Sterling said, not being one to overlook decent exchanges of greetings just because the circumstances were less than formal.

"Morning, Sterling." Rebecca's brown curls bounced as she slid up the bed and rested her head on Alistair's chest, a proud smile on her face. Alistair twirled a strand around his finger before sitting up and kissing her forehead.

"Babe, Sterling and I have to leave. We're expected at our parent's place in less than an hour."

"All right, I get it," Rebecca said, reaching for her shorts which were hanging from Alistair's bed frame. Alistair knew that, more than anything, Rebecca wanted an invitation to go with them. She had for years been asking to meet his parents but he had always refused. The second he brought a girl home to see them, they would push for an engagement and start making the arrangements right then and there. Not that spending the rest of his life with Rebecca would be such a bad thing. He could be stuck with someone like Kalyn, who, although incredibly hot, was more annoying than a gnat in iced tea. But Alistair didn't want to commit. He

knew he could have Rebecca anytime he wanted, spend as much time with her as he pleased, in and out of bed. But what if something better came along?

Rebecca pulled her shorts on and leaned in to kiss him. He let her, not caring that his brother was in the room, not caring that he had yet to brush his teeth and his breath still tasted like alcohol.

"We'll finish this later?" She asked quietly, trying to sound seductive.

Alistair kissed her again and smiled at her. Of course they would. It was what they did.

Rebecca answered him with an excited grin. She hopped off the bed and skipped past Sterling on her way out the door.

Sterling waited until the door had closed until he began reprimanding his twin brother. "That girl is going to kill herself one day because of you. How many times are you going to break her heart before you realize you two belong together?"

"Belong together? Please, you sound like Mom. And she knows what she's getting every time she comes home with me."

Sterling rolled his eyes and went to his closet, picking out a clean shirt and a pair of cargo shorts.

"Where did you stay last night, anyway?" Alistair stood up and stretched before finding some clean underwear from his drawer.

"Tennille's room, as usual."

"Tennille's room? Was her new roommate there? God, that girl was hot."

"Laila? Yeah, she was there." Sterling smiled. Of course she had been there. He would have slept in the common room if she hadn't been.

"And. How was she? I bet she can fuck like a college girl. All those west coast girls can."

"You have never slept with anyone who lived west of Ohio, so how would you know?"

"So I've heard," Alistair answered, winking at his brother.

Sterling rolled his eyes and tossed a clean pair of socks onto Alistair's bed. His brother hadn't done laundry in weeks, packing all his dirty clothes in his suitcase and waiting until the dire end to take them to a Laundromat.

"Thanks," Alistair sat on the bed and pulled the socks on. "But you didn't answer my question. How was she?"

"I wouldn't know. She made me stay in Tennille's bed."

Alistair threw his head back and laughed. "That's so shitty!"

"I'm pretty sure she's a virgin. A far cry from most of the girls at this place."

"That's the damn truth," Alistair said, counting in his head just how many of the girls at Harper's he had deflowered. It wasn't as many as Julian Polk, but a number worth bragging about, nonetheless.

"I don't know. There's definitely something different about her."

Alistair looked at his brother. Sterling usually didn't want to talk about the girls he was interested in. Probably because he hadn't been interested in a girl for a very long time. Sure, he would mess around with one every now and then, but unlike Alistair, he wasn't eager to share the details of his conquests.

"You like her, don't you?"

Sterling turned his back on his brother and reached for his deodorant, waiting until he had applied it before speaking again.

"So what if I do?"

Alistair smiled from his bed, leaning over and tying his shoes. Sterling hadn't been the same since his heart had been ripped from his chest and tacked to the wall for all of the school to see. Alistair knew Sterling wasn't the type of guy who could dismiss girls as easily as he could. He often made fun of his brother, telling him he would be more interesting if he got laid more often. But secretly, he had wanted Sterling to find someone new, someone to take his mind off his ex.

"So, I think that's great."

Sterling turned around and looked at his brother. Alistair had never been one for relationships but everything about his statement had seemed sincere.

"Thanks, Al."

"You're welcome. Now, let's go. Mom's going to kill us when we get there so we might as well get it over with."

Sterling nodded in agreement and grabbed his car keys from his desk. Knowing Alistair, he was probably still drunk from the night before.

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"Oh my God! What did the note say?"

Laila blushed and handed it to her roommate.

"You look beautiful in the morning. I can't wait to see you again! Shit, girl, you've already got this boy wrapped around your finger!" Tennille smiled proudly at her roommate who had seemed so shy only yesterday.

"I don't know if it's really like that. He was just trying to be sweet."

"Exactly! Sterling Pierce isn't sweet. Sure he's nice and a gentleman. But no girl would actually describe him as sweet. He usually doesn't give anyone a second glance, even if he's trying to sleep with them."

"Do you think that's all he's doing with me? Trying to get me into bed?"

"I seriously doubt it. If he didn't get into your panties last night, he would have given up already. But this," Tennille waved the purple post-it note wildly in front of Laila. "This is ground breaking!"

Laila laughed. She couldn't help it. Her head was telling her to keep away from Sterling, but her heart and her body didn't want to allow that. The goofy grin hadn't left her face since she woke up that morning and read his note. She couldn't wait to see him again.

Chapter 4: Like Old Times

The first day of school was like most days for Kalyn. She had woken up early, showered, fixed her hair, put on her uniform, applied perfume and make up, and walked to class. This year was slightly different, though. This year she was a senior and could tell by the looks from the underclassmen, boys and girls alike, that she was going to be queen bee of the school. Not that this surprised her, she had been working towards this title for three years now and eager to accept her crown.

Stepping into her English class that morning, she looked around the familiar surroundings. Bench desks lined the stadium style classroom, text books and students already lying on the tables in a vegetative state of boredom. But something made Kalyn stop in her tracks that morning. Sitting in the upper corner of the room was Tennille's new roommate, Laila. Kalyn hated to admit it, but the girl was cute. She had that natural blonde hair with just a hint of red, perfect skin and hot body. At least Kalyn had bigger boobs. She smiled to herself as she glanced down at her cleavage. Her black lace bra was just barely visible beneath the white button-up shirt of her uniform. Her navy blue skirt had been hemmed inches above the designated length and her black patent leather heels were new and shamelessly high. No, nothing was going to ruin her day, especially some prissy bitch from California.

She felt something brush by her shoulder and looked up to see Sterling Pierce walking by.

"Sterling!" Kalyn exclaimed as if she hadn't seen him in years.

"Hey, Kalyn." Sterling's gorgeous eyes looked her up and down before meeting hers with an unhidden look of annoyance. So many times she had stared into his eyes. The dark blue one had always been her favorite, but the green one was almost as nice. She missed the way he used to look at her. He used to look at her with love and excitement, but that was a long time ago and they had both moved on. At least, they made it seem as if they had moved on. Kalyn still harbored feelings for him and she was pretty sure Sterling could be convinced to feel the same with a little persuasion.

"You look great, as usual," she smiled at him.

"You look like you missed a few buttons on your shirt," was all he said before turning his head and searching for a vacant seat.

"Why don't you sit with me?" Kalyn asked, putting a hand on his arm. "It will be just like old times."

But Sterling shrugged her hand away and glared at her. "Kalyn, it will never be like old times. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've already found a seat."

Kalyn's lips pulled tight and her brow furrowed as she watched him walk up the stairs, straight toward Laila. The new girl raised her head as she saw him moving her way, a smile growing on her face as he neared. Ever the gentleman, Sterling pointed to the chair next to her and asked to sit down. Kalyn glared at her as the blonde blushed and nodded, encouraging him to take the seat. Sterling sat next to her and put his bag on the table, leaning in to her as he did so. The blood boiled in Kalyn's veins when she saw him brush Laila's hair from her face and plant a gentle kiss on her cheek.

"Fucking prissy bitch," Kalyn muttered under her breath as she turned on her heels and walked to the other side of the classroom. Tasha had saved her a seat and Kalyn threw her books on the floor, slamming herself into the chair and swearing under the breath.

"What's with you today?"

Kalyn looked at Tasha. Her hair was a mousy brown, straight and thin as silk but closer to the texture of hay. Her cheeks were constantly pink and her nose was too small for her face. But her family had more money than the Queen of England the girls had grown up together in Vermont. Tasha was the closest thing Kalyn had to a best friend.

"It's that new girl, Laila. She's already getting on my nerves."

"Still her? Get over it, Kalyn. You've only got a year with her." Tasha had learned to cut through Kalyn's bullshit years ago and on most days, Kalyn appreciated it. But not today. Today Kalyn was feeling spiteful.

"I know. Julian just really pissed me off last night and I haven't gotten my period."

"You need me to take you to the clinic?" Tasha asked without batting an eye or bothering to lower her voice.

"No. I'm just PMS-ing."

Tasha rolled her eyes. "What did Julian do, anyway?"

"I caught him in bed with some sophomore. He didn't even bother pulling out as he casually asked me to come back later."

"Look, Kalyn, I'm only going to say this once this year because you heard it enough last year. You two aren't engaged yet. He's clearly enjoying his freedom and you should be enjoying yours. Why do you even care what he does?"

"Tasha, I'm supposed to marry the guy," Kalyn reminded her friend. "He should want me and only me."

"Clearly whatever you're doing is working wonders. Why don't you focus your attention on something, or someone, who you actually want?"

Kalyn sighed. Tasha was right, she needed to focus on what she wanted. Fuck Julian and their so-called betrothment. She had no obligations to him until they graduated and wasn't going to let him rule the last year of her single life. Her eyes focused across the room as the teacher called the class to attention. Sterling was watching Laila as she opened her book and pushed it between them so they could share. Kalyn stared at him until he felt her eyes on his face. He glanced up and their eyes met, Kalyn smiling as innocently as she could manage. But Sterling frowned and shook his head, returning his attention to the text book.

Kalyn was determined now. She would get him to love her again. He couldn't deny how amazing they had been together, couldn't take back the words he said when he promised to love her forever, couldn't pretend he didn't want her anymore. He was a guy, after all, and half of their brains resided below their belt lines.

Chapter 5: Take Me Into Love

"Miss Roberts? You can come in now."

Laila stepped confidently into Mr. London's office. She had spoken with him on the phone before arriving at Harper's but had never met him face to face. He wasn't exactly how she imagined he would be. Mr. London was probably thirty pounds overweight and shorter than she had pictured. He stood behind his desk, his pudgy hand extended for hers, a warm smile on his round face.

"Hi, Mr. London. It's really nice to finally meet you."

"Likewise, Miss Roberts. Please, sit."

"Thank you." Laila smiled at him and sat down in the plush chair across the desk from his.

"So, tell me. How was your first week at Harper's Preparatory?" His eyes were eager for approval.

"It's different than St. Mary's, that's for sure," Laila offered. "But I'm making some friends and the work load seems manageable."

"Well, I would hope so. You've taken half the classes already."

Laila blushed. That was true. She had intended on graduating early from St. Mary's and had overloaded on credits her junior year. But Harper's acceptance letter had made her change her mind.

"Are you homesick? Transfer students, especially those who aren't accustomed to the boarding school life, often find themselves missing the comforts of home more than others."

"I am. But this is a good warm up for college."

Mr. London smiled at her. "Yale, right?"

"That's the goal. And that's why I'm here today," Laila was ready to cut through the small talk. Sterling had asked her out to dinner and she was eager to see him again.

"What can I help you with, then?"

"Well, you know what Yale is looking for so I was hoping that you could help me find ways to improve my transcript."

"Laila, you're a straight A student with a near perfect SAT score. There's not a whole lot more you can do other than become captain of a sports team, student body president maybe."

Laila shook her head. Both of those ideas were out of the question. "Isn't there something lessâ ¦participatory I could try?"

Mr. London laughed at her. "Yale likes leadership. But they also like community service and the ability to prove your knowledge. Have you thought about tutoring underclassmen?"

"I could do that," Laila was almost excited at the idea.

"Lucky for you, it pays as well," Mr. London said, reaching into his desk and looking through his papers.

Laila smiled. She didn't need extra money but it would be nice to have some cash to spend without her parents being able to see her purchases on her credit card statement.

"What subject interests you?"

"Anything I guess. What has the highest demand?"

"Physics and Chemistry mostly."

"Sign me up for Physics, I guess."

"You may want to sound a bit more enthusiastic about the subject when you start tutoring." Mr. London teased her.

"I love Physics," Laila said in cheery voice. "It's challenging and can be seen at work in everything we do."

Mr. London and Laila laughed at her sarcasm.

"You'll be fine."

"Thank you for all your help." Laila stood up to leave.

"It's my pleasure, Miss Roberts." Mr. London stood up and walked her to the door, holding it open for her.

"I'll let you know when there's a student in need of a physics tutor. It shouldn't be more than a few weeks, I imagine."

"Thanks again." Laila smiled at him and shook his hand. "Later."

"Good evening."

Laila was scolding herself for forgetting her well rehearsed salutations and farewells as she walked through the door and ran straight into Kalyn. The girl stood a few inches taller than Laila and looked down at her with contempt, her large brown eyes seething with hatred and disgust.

"Sorry," Laila murmured as she walked around her, Kalyn's head tilting in a regal nod as if she couldn't believe Laila poisoned her ears with one word.

"Ah, Miss. Andretti, what can I do for you today?" Mr. London's voice was fading into the background as Laila left the waiting room and turned into the hallway. Despite her run-in with Kalyn, Laila was on cloud nine as she walked back to her dorm. Yale was within her grasp and nothing was going to stand in her way. Sterling would be a pleasant distraction, but he seemed to be as motivated as she was. He had sat next to her in English and again in History, their only two classes together, and had been attentive and studious as the teachers lectured. This only made Laila like him even more.

Laila slowed her step as she approached her room. Tennille was playing the violin and it could be heard halfway down the hallway. Tennille had called herself a musical prodigy but that didn't quite do her justice. Musical genius was a better term, for Tennille didn't have talent, she had a gift.

Laila opened the door quietly, her roommate had her eyes closed, her long black hair was flowing down her back as she swayed in time with her bow, her shoulders flexing in exaggerated movements as she played.

Tennille opened her eyes as Laila shut the door and she smiled at her roommate. She always played better in front of an audience and Laila seemed more than eager to let her play for hours on end. Her innocent roommate with the strange violet eyes smiled back and took a seat at the foot of her bed, staring up at Tennille with a childlike sense of awe.

Tennille closed her eyes again, content that Laila would wait until she was finished before removing her attention. She poured her feelings through her bow and into her music. She had written the song for Tate after he had told her he loved her. It was her going to be her original composition for her entrance exam to Juilliard, her ticket to the rest of her life.

Tennille heard clapping as she finished, her bow still in her hand, resting casually at her side.

"That was beautiful!" Laila gushed. "What was it?"

"A Tennille Kelly original."

Laila's eyes were wide with admiration. "Serious? You wrote that?"

"Impressed?" Tennille laughed.

"Incredibly," Laila laughed as well. "Do you have anymore that you've written?"

"Only a few dozen, or so. But that one is my favorite."

"What's it called?"

"I call it Take Me into Love. I wrote it the night Tate told me he loved me. The first time weâ ¦ well, you know."

"That's so romantic," Laila blushed.

Tennille put the violin back in its case and sat down on her bed facing her roommate. She liked this girl. She wasn't like the rest of the snobby girls at Harper's. Sure, there were a few who were better than the others, better than the Kalyn Andrettis and Tasha Davenports of the world, but most of the good ones were trying too hard to impress the others, losing all their appeal in the process. Laila was different. She seemed to be immune to all of that. Completely clueless, no question about it, but naturally kind hearted.

"So what about you? Ever been in love?"

"Me? No. Not yet."

"And what about Sterling? Could he be the lucky guy who steals your heart?"

"Maybe," Laila admitted, looking down at her feet and smiling. "Tennille," she asked after a moment's pause. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course."

"If it's too personal, just tell me and I won't be offendedâ¦"

"Laila, nothing is too personal for me. I'm an open book."

Laila smiled. She liked that about Tennille. There were no secrets, no hidden agendas, just pure honesty.

"How did you know you were ready to sleep with Tate?"

"Oh! That's an easy one. I realized one day, after we had been together for a couple of months, that I trusted him and loved him completely. I was a virgin so I wasn't going to throw myself at him. I made him wait until he was fully committed."

"Did he know you were making him wait?"

Tennille laughed. "We didn't talk about it, but I think he knew. But he's not the type of guy to lie about loving me just to get me into bed."

"Clearly. You two are practically perfect together."

"Practically, but not quite."

"What could possibly be wrong in your relationship?"

"Ha! I could name a thousand things that are wrong in our relationship. We fight all the time because we are so similar, both stubborn and bullish." Tennille shook her head and smiled. "But for everything that is wrong with us, there are a million things that are right. And whenever I'm upset with him, I play his song and remember how much I love him."

"Wow, I really never expected to hear you say something so incredibly sappy," Laila smiled and Tennille laughed at her sarcasm.

"Whatever, Miss I'm-keeping-Sterling's-note-in-my-underwear-drawer!"

Laila laughed and stood up. "Speaking of, I have a date."

"So that's what all the questions were about! Are you thinking of sleeping with Sterling?"

"What? No! We're dating. I guess, I don't know. I'm still not sure if he's serious about me."

"Yet he's been here every evening this week and can't keep his eyes off of you."

Laila smiled. That was true. "We may be headed towards something more, but for right now, I'm holding on to my V card."

Tennille laughed. "You don't know what you're missing. But you hold on to it for as long as you can. It's worth a lot, trust me."

"Thanks, Tennille. Help me pick out an outfit?"

"Of course. Anything for you, girl."

A/N: Sorry it's kind of a slow chapter, but it's setting up something for something bigger. More will be up tomorrow :) Much Love, Pink

Chapter 6: You Want This?

A/N:Thank you to everyone who has been reading! Ijust wanted to give you all a heads up about this chapter because it contains the first sex scene. Okay, so you've been warned :) Much Love, Pink

"Well, that was entertaining," Kalyn said with a roll of her eyes as she climbed into the front seat of Julian's car.

"As always," her escort replied as he jumped into the driver's seat.Julian loved his car.He could spend hours behind the wheel, the soft leather pressing against his skin as the illegal speeds forced his body against the seat.But with Kalyn along for the ride, things just weren't as enjoyable.Sure, she was pretty and her family had a ton of money.But she was also boring, conceited, and manipulative.Not like her friend Tasha who refused to play games or take sides.Why couldn't his parents have been best friends with the Davenports instead of the Andrettis?Then he would be marrying Tasha in a few years instead of the bottle blonde Barbie sitting next to him now.

"I was thinking about what they said earlier," Kalyn was saying."About us going to college together.It seems only right that an engaged couple would be attending the same school."

Julian hit the gas and screeched out of his parent's driveway.The 2 hour drive back to school would be cut in half if he could avoid a speeding ticket.

"You're grades aren't good enough to get into Harvard."

"So then what's wrong with Columbia?"

"Columbia?Are you fucking joking, Kalyn?Everything is wrong with Columbia."Actually, nothing was wrong with that school.It was a great school.But if Kalyn were there, enough would be wrong with it for Julian to stay hundreds of miles away.In fact, Julian had made it a point to only apply to schools he knew she wouldn't be accepted to.Even her parent's money couldn't help her into Harvard with a C- GPA.

"If you are insisting on Harvard, I can always go to Boston University.We can live in the city together."

"Or not."

Kalyn was silent for a moment."You're right.It wouldn't look good if we lived together before we are married.Guess we should keep up appearances."

Julian could hear the smile in her voice and he nearly cringed when he felt her hand on his leg.

"You know, I was thinking," she said, leaning into him and whispering in his ear."Maybe you could come back to my room and help me blow off some steam.These dinners with our parents always get me so wound up.I need a releaseâ ¦" her hand gently massaged him through his khakis as she propositioned him.Julian had to give respect where respect was due: Kalyn really did know what to do with her hands.But he wasn't in the mood to spend the night with her.The way he saw it, in a few years he would be stuck with her for life so there was no longer any point in getting to know her, physically or emotionally.He could waste his time on that later.

"Sorry, I've got plans tonight."Julian kept his eyes on the road.

"With who?That little sophomore slut?"Kalyn pushed herself away from him and slumped back into her seat.She hated that she had been unable to make herself stop wanting Julian.There was just something about him, something that made her want to please him but he always pushed her away.They were both resentful about the situation, that was obvious and to be expected, but at least she was trying.He only gave an effort around their parents.

"Does it matter?"

"I guess not," Kalyn agreed.She didn't want to know who or what he was going to sleep with next.She hated most of the girls in her class because they had, to some degree or another, all taken Julian's attention away from her.

Kalyn pulled her phone out of her purse and started texting.

Rough night.You available?

"Who are you texting?" Julian asked, glancing at her lap where her phone was glowing.

"Does it matter?"

His question being turned back on him didn't please him at all."Look, I can't ask you to stay celibate until we are married.And I wouldn't want to.But I don't want a whore for a wife, either.Just make sure the boys you choose to fuck can be discreet."

"You are such a hypocrite, Julian!"He was entertained by how easy it was to get a rise out of Kalyn.

"So what if I am?But you better get used to it, sweetheart, unless you want us both to lose our inheritance."

Kalyn crossed her arms and looked out her window.She didn't know what she would do if her parents disowned her.College was going to be little more than a practical joke, a complete waste of time.When she became Mrs. Julian Polk, she wouldn't need to work, nor would her husband want her to.Her job would be to raise their children.Or, more likely, to supervise as a nanny raised them for her.Why her future with Julian was so important to her was a complete mystery.It sounded miserable.But, nevertheless, she didn't want to disappoint him.

The rest of the ride back to Harper's was spent in silence.The trees grew thick as they approached, their leaves starting to change colors for fall, and the roads narrowed.

I'm free.Where are you?

Kalyn's phone vibrated on her lap and she shielded the screen from Julian.

20 minutes.Your room.

Julian didn't take his eyes from the road, although a smirk appeared on his lips.He couldn't possibly know who she was planning on meeting. It was probably the only person at school who he would object to her seeing.Well, second only to Sterling Pierce.Julian knew that Kalyn had been in love with Sterling when their parents announced what they had planned for them.Kalyn had cried and cried when she realized what she was going to have to do.Breaking up with Sterling had been the hardest thing she had ever done.For him, it came out of nowhere.She couldn't tell him the truth and let him believe that Julian had stolen her heart.Of course, once the rumors started, Sterling figured it out on his own although he never forgave her.

But Julian had been great those first few months after Kalyn broke up with Sterling.He let her cry on his shoulder, let her spend the night when she was lonely, and before long Kalyn actually started developing true feelings for him.She was overjoyed the first time he called her his girlfriend, but couldn't help feeling that if things had been different, had their parents not interfered, she would still be happy with Sterling.But as the months passed, just as Kalyn had started becoming comfortable with their situation, Julian started pushing her away.They would fight and break up, get drunk and sleep together, wake up and be back to where they were the day before.It was a vicious cycle, but at least he was still acting like a boyfriend part of the time.What had changed for them their senior year was still uncertain.But Julian clearly wanted nothing to do with her.

Kalyn tried to push all this from her mind as she watched Julian walk to the boy's wing of the dormitory.She waited a few minutes before following, wanting to make sure he didn't see her when she knocked on the door.Chase Nichols was one of the lucky students who didn't have a roommate.He could most likely thank his parent's donations for that, and so could Kalyn on many occasions, for that matter.

"Hey, I was starting to give up on you," Chase said as he opened the door.His shirt was already off, there were no pretenses here."Did Julian actually learn how to drive the speed limit?"

"Can we not talk about Julian right now?" Kalyn snapped, kicking off her shoes and pulling off her sweater.

"I won't say another word," Chase smiled at her, locking his door and unbuttoning his pants.Kalyn stared at him as he undressed.Chase was thin and lanky, his muscles were lean and it didn't look like there was an ounce of fat on him.The chestnut hair on his head matched the small patch on his chest and the larger patch between his legs.His face was nothing to write home about.He was average looking, at best, and standing next to Julian, he was practically invisible.Some say he had a nice smile when he actually chose to show it.But Kalyn was after the one part of Chase that was above average.Way above average.

As he stripped the last of his clothing, Kalyn smiled at his impressive size.She knew all she had to do was look at it for it to become hard, and look at it she did.Her lips curled into an eager smile of anticipation as Chase reached down and stroked himself a few times.She could feel her panties getting wet with desire as he took two slow steps toward her.

"You want this?" Chase asked, eyeing Kalyn's lips as he neared.He wanted to strip her naked, force her to her knees, and thrust his entire length into her mouth.But he didn't.It was much more satisfying when she did it on her own because it gave him more power.He wasn't a vengeful person by nature, but there was something satisfying in the knowledge that Julian Polk's fiancÃ©e was sucking him dry because she wanted to.

Kalyn stepped out of her skirt and unbuttoned her blouse, her large breasts heaving beneath her silk bra."Sit down and I'll show you just how badly I want you."

Chase moved slowly to his bed although his feet were begging him to run.He sat down and threw a pillow on the floor between his feet.

"Thank you," Kalyn said with a seductive smile.

He answered with a shrug of his shoulders as she positioned herself on the ground.Her hands started at his knees and slowly made their way up his thighs as she licked her lips.She didn't tease him for long and ran her warm tongue up his length before taking him in her mouth.Chase moaned as he felt her take more of him in.His hands went to the back of her scalp, gripping her blonde hair and forcing her just a little further down his shaft.He knew she would gag, but he also knew she could take it.Before long, he could feel himself reaching his climax and when Kalyn added a warm, gripping hand to her already steady movements, he finished within seconds.

The hot substance hit the back of Kalyn's throat and she swallowed it before giving Chase one last squeeze.Her eyes opened and she saw the look of contentment on his face, her reward for a job well done.She unhooked her bra, throwing it on the ground before standing up and straddling his thighs.Her breasts pushed against chest as she rolled her hips over his, making sure he could feel how wet she was.She kissed his neck and his chest, but never his mouth.In the months they had been sleeping together, sneaking around behind Julian's back, they had never kissed.But they both preferred it that way.It was less personal.

"You don't even need to be warmed up, do you?" She heard him ask.

"I'm here to be fucked, not played with," she answered and felt his large hands reach for her hips.She knew what was coming next and was prepared for it.Chase threw her onto the bed with one strong movement and had pulled her panties down before she was able to recover her bearings.

"Turn over," he commanded and she gladly obeyed.Completely vulnerable on her hands and knees, Kalyn pressed her backside into the air and waited for him to enter her.She was throbbing for him, but she didn't have to wait long.Chase's hands were on either side of her buttocks, lifting her and positioning her before he guided himself in.His first thrust was slow and painfully deliberate but the second one didn't disappoint.With a groan, Chase rammed himself into her tight core.

"Oh, God!" Kalyn moaned quietly, knowing the walls of Harper's were thin and anyone could be walking by.

Chase smiled down at her back.She did it every time, tried to suppress her cries, thinking no one knew what they were doing in here.Most of the students in their class wouldn't say it out loud, but they all knew what was going on between them.Julian seemed to be the only person left in the dark.Or maybe he knew but didn't care.

"Harder, Chase.I need to finish!"

He could really care less if Kalyn finished or not but he also knew that if she didn't, she would go somewhere else to get what she wanted.He never had trouble getting girls, but, unlike most of the other girls at school, Kalyn knew how to fuck.She was willing to do nearly everything he wanted to try and never wanted to snuggle or spend the night when they were done.

Chase gripped Kalyn's hip with his left hand, thrusting inside of her as his right hand moved between her legs.His thumb pressed against her engorged nub as he rode her hard.

"Oh my God," she moaned as she pulled a pillow into her face and muffled her scream.He kept his motions strong and steady as she felt the walls of her core pulling him deeper inside.Her body started to quiver and she moaned into her pillow again as she climaxed.Chase thrust a few last times, pressing his fingers into her skin as he gripped her hips and exploded inside of her.Collapsing on the bed, he could feel she was still shaking with excitement and he ran his hands up her sides a few times.

"Feel better?"Chase asked, rolling off of her and relaxing on his back.

"So much better," Kalyn smiled as she turned onto her back as well."Thank you."

"Anytime," Chase laughed.

Kalyn laughed as well but sat up and started searching for her clothes."So, how was the first month of your senior year?"

"It's been fine."

"Yeah?I haven't seen you around too much.Did you find some girl to occupy your time?"Kalyn smiled at him as she pulled her panties up.

"Maybe," Chase smiled back, slightly upset as she put her bra on, covering her perfectly shaped breasts.

"Who is she?"

"Laila Roberts."He felt no need to keep it a secret from Kalyn.

But Kalyn rolled her eyes and scoffed at the name."What is it with guys and that girl?Is she really that pretty?"

Chase knew Kalyn was talking about Sterling.Laila and Sterling had been practically inseparable since the first day of school.Though they weren't an official couple, the two of them were never seen without the other.

"It's not just her looks, Kalyn.She's different from the other girls at school."

"Because she's from California?Because she's a virgin?"

"You don't know that."

"Word is that Sterling won't commit to her because she refuses to sleep with him."

"And you would like nothing better than if he started sleeping with you again."Chase commented as she put her shoes on.

"Whatever," Kalyn rolled her eyes for a second time."Look, I heard her outside of Mr. London's office the other week, she's signed up to be a physics tutor.So if you want to spend some time with her, just tell your teacher you need some extra help."

"Physics?I hate physics."

"Well, then, you'll probably need a tutor.Just remember, little miss innocent isn't going to just jump into bed with you.You're going to have to get to know her and be nice to her and all those unpleasant things," Kalyn smiled at him before opening the door and leaving the room.The smell of sex was still thick in the air as Chase's room became silent.He lay on his bed, letting the sweat on his skin cool his heated body.Maybe a physics tutor wouldn't be that bad.

Chapter 7: Pinky Swear

Sterling gently pushed Laila onto the pillows of his bed as his fingers traced her jaw and brushed through her silky hair. They had been kissing for nearly an hour and even though she hadn't let him get any further, he still felt as if he could kiss her for the rest of the night. He could feel Laila's small body tense under the weight of his. Even though he would never push her to have sex, it was obvious she was thinking about it. He knew she didn't want to disappoint him and he was eager for the day to finally arrive when he could make love to her, but he didn't want her to rush the decision.

"Sterling," Laila's soft voice whispered against his lips. "I have to go."

"No you don't," he teased her, kissing her again.

"Yes, I do." She broke away from his kiss and turned her head, giving him perfect access to her slender neck. He gentle nibbled his way down, feeling and hearing her breathing accelerate the closer he moved to her chest.

"Where do you have to go?" He asked, pulling her V-neck sweater to the side so he could kiss the soft curve of her breast.

"I told you, I have a tutoring session this evening." Laila could barely understand the words coming out of her mouth. Sterling's touch, as always, was driving her near insane. She couldn't think straight, couldn't act right, could barely remember to breathe when she found herself in this situation with him.

"I'll tutor you, we won't need to leave this room," he said, cupping her breast through the fabric of her sweater. His mouth was warm on her chest and she longed to feel it all over her skin. But she had made a commitment and she intended to stick to it, even if it meant leaving Sterling for the night.

"I'm the one doing the tutoring, silly." Her fingers ran up and down his back.

"Laila, you can't leave. I don't want you to."

She laughed at his whine and pulled at his hair so he would raise his head and kiss her. Sterling groaned as her tongue teased his. Laila smiled under his lips, knowing her actions were turning him on. She didn't want to tease him, but she loved that she was able to get him excited.

"Do you have any idea what you are doing to me?" He asked when their kiss ended.

"Maybe," she smiled and pushed against his chest. He sat up, allowing her to do the same, watching as she adjusted her sweater.

"Seriously, Laila, why are you doing this whole tutoring thing?"

"It will look good on my application to Yale," she told him as if he should have been able to guess.

He caught her hand as she stood up and pulled her to him. She stumbled but caught herself before she fell on top of him. Laughing, she bent down and kissed him lightly on the lips.

"What if I told you that you could get into Yale without all the extra-curricular nonsense you think is so necessary?"

"Oh, really?" She smiled down at him and ran her fingers through his ashy hair. "How could I do that?"

Sterling closed his eyes at her touch. Her fingers in his hair felt like heaven and made his entire body tingle with an innocent yearning.

"You," he started, grabbing her hands and kissing the inside of her wrists, "wouldn't have to do a thing. Just one phone call is all it takes."

"And who would I call?"

"No one. I would call my dad," he said as he lifted her sweater and kissed her stomach.

"And what would your dad be able to do?" Her voice was inquisitive but hesitant.

"He plays golf with the dean of admissions. They were fraternity brothers, class of 76."

"Are you serious?" Laila took a step back and Sterling raised his head to look at her. She didn't look angry or excited, just conflicted.

"Very. And I promise to call him first thing in the morning if you will skip your tutoring session." Sterling smiled at her, knowing she wasn't going to accept his offer.

"I don't think so," she smiled back. "But thank you, all the same."

He watched her bend over and pick up her backpack from the floor and swing it over her shoulder. "You know I'm going to call him eventually, don't you?"

"You don't need to do that."

"But I want to."

"You don't think I can get in on my own?" She teased him as she walked back to the bed where he was still sitting.

"I never said that," he smiled up at her. "I just don't like leaving things like this up to chance."

"Things like this?" She gave him a curious look. "Things like me getting into a good school?"

"Things like us being together next year." He was quick to admit.

Her eyes softened and a wide smile crept over her face. "Are you talking about our future?"

"Yes. Unless, that is, you don't think we have one." He smiled back and reached for her hand.

"You would bring this topic up when I have to leave," she bent down and kissed him again before walking toward the door.

"You're leaving?"

"Yes, I have to," she laughed at him.

"Wait! What about our future!" He screamed after her and laughed as well.

She was already halfway out the door when she paused and turned to look at him. "Our future together, I imagine, will be long enough to finish this discussion tomorrow."

Laila and Sterling smiled at each other for a moment before she blushed and closed the door behind her. Taking a deep breath, she couldn't wipe the grin from her face. Sterling imagined a future together. That thought, accompanied by the now very possible idea of Yale, filled her with such an excited warmth she didn't even notice how cold it was getting as she walked across campus to the library.

She had gotten an email from Mr. London, explaining that she was to meet the student in the Library at 7:30. She was going to be early, but she didn't mind. She wanted to make sure she was comfortable with the material before she attempted to tutor anybody on the subject.

Sitting down in the tutoring room, she looked around. It was large and quiet. There were a few other students and teachers but no one she recognized. She pulled out her physics book, calculator and some scratch paper, trying to look as organized as possible before the student arrived. The door opened and she looked up with a curious expression. It was Randy, Tennille's friend. They hadn't spoken much, but from what she could tell, he was a genuinely nice guy. His bright red hair stood out in the crowd he tried to disappear in, but people seemed to generally overlook him. And he was comfortable with this, content to live in the background.

Laila smiled and giggled as Randy smiled back, waiving stupidly and tripping over a chair on his way over to her.

"You aren't here for a History tutor, are you?" He whispered when he reached her table.

"No. Physics."

"Damn. I was hoping to be tutoring someone I knew."

"I know. Me too! I'm new to this whole tutoring thing and am pretty nervous."

"You and me both." Randy looked around nervously.

"You doing this for your college application as well?"

"My advisor said it would help."

"Mine too," Laila admitted.

"What school are you trying for?" Randy finally sat down and smiled at her.

"Yale. You?"

"UPenn."

"Nice." Laila smiled back.

"I'd do anything to graduate early, but it doesn't look too hopeful. Harper's isn't too keen on the idea."

"It's not that bad here, is it?"

"I guess not. I guess by now I've grown used to it but college will be a refreshing new start."

"I know exactly what you mean," Laila commiserated. "I don't know how you've put up with the social politics of this place for so long."

"I've been Switzerland. Cold and neutral."

Laila laughed and nodded her head. "Well, it's almost over."

"You seem to be fitting in just fine," Randy commented.

"I try to keep out of everyone's way as much as possible. It's easy to do when you're friends with Tennille."

"And the Pierce twins."

"That helps, I suppose." Laila blushed.

"Tennille's great," Randy changed the subject as he sensed Laila's embarrassment. "She and Tate have been really nice to me these past three years. You're lucky to have them as friends."

Laila nodded. "I agree. I can't imagine what life would have been like if I had been roommates with someone like Kalyn Andretti."

Randy laughed. "I heard she isn't your biggest fan."

"Dude, the girl hates me!" Laila laughed. "The glares she gives me from across the classroom could cut glass."

Randy laughed with her. He liked how her personality shown through even though she tried so hard to suppress it. "You know why, don't you?"

"It can't be because of what I said the day of that dance?"

"That probably started it but I imagine her real reasoning comes fromâ ¦"

"Um, Randy?" They were interrupted by a soft voice. Laila looked up to see Rebecca Valencourt standing at the end of their table.

"Rebecca," Randy stammered and stood up. His face flushed and a goofy grin stuck to his lips.

"Sorry to interrupt," Rebecca said, looking between Randy and Laila. "But I'm looking for my History tutor. That wouldn't be one of you, would it?"

"That would be me," Randy said, a sudden eagerness in his voice.

"Oh. Great." Rebecca smiled at him and then looked back at Laila.

"Have fun," Laila told them as Randy stumbled to pick up his bag and waved goodbye. Rebecca smiled at her and followed Randy to a table. Laila grinned as she watched him pull out a chair for her and then debate whether he wanted to sit next to or across from her. But her smile sank when she saw the next person walk through the doors. Chase Nichols. The very sight of him made her skin crawl. His constant stare hadn't relented since they first met yet he hadn't spoken a word to her. She didn't think she even knew what his voice

sounded like.

Chase noticed Laila sitting by herself the instant he walked into the tutoring room. She looked vulnerable as she tried to avoid his gaze. He liked that but remembered what Kalyn had told him. This girl wasn't going to jump into bed with him. He was going to be forced to take his time with her, let her know that he was interested in more than what was beneath her jeans and V-neck sweater. So he smiled, not a genuine smile, but a soft one, as he walked over to her.

"Laila?" He asked quietly.

His voice must have surprised her because she looked at him as if she had never seen him before.

"Hi, Chase."

"You must be my Physics tutor," he said, knowing very well she was.

Laila nodded and he could tell she was nervous.

"Great. I hope you're good at this stuff. I'm completely lost." He kept the casual smile on his face and watched her face grimace as he sat down. This girl must be repulsed by him. Lovely.

"Chase, I don't thinkâ ¦" Laila started to tell him she couldn't go through with tutoring him but then thought again. Sterling had said he could get her into Yale but her acceptance letter would be that much sweeter if she knew she had accomplished it on her own. She glanced at Chase from across the table. His voice had been so much softer than she had imagined. He was smiling at her with a genuinely content expression on his face and didn't seem to have any other agenda than learning about Physics.

"I don't think you have anything to worry about," she smiled back at him and tried to laugh away her discomfort.

"Good," Chase said, leaning across the table. "Because I have a secret to tell you."

"What's that?" Laila didn't realize she was leaning into him as well.

"I'm failing," he whispered, his doe eyes holding hers in a sorrowful gaze. "I don't think they'll let me into a good school if I fail."

His face looked incredibly worried as he confessed his secret and Laila couldn't help but feel sorry for him. In class he always played it so cool, never asking questions, never letting anyone know that he was anything but in control. But here he was, clearly scared for his future. Maybe she had been wrong about him. Maybe he was just misunderstood.

"Don't worry. I won't let you fail," she promised him.

"Pinky swear?" Chase put his elbow on the table and his fist in the air, his pinky finger raised.

"What?" Laila laughed.

"Pinky swear on it," he laughed as well. "Come on. We're both wasting a perfectly good Thursday night being here. I need some sort of promise it will be worth it."

"Fine," Laila said as she smiled. "I pinky swear." Their tiniest fingers hooked together and Chase beamed at her.

Chase could literally see Laila's anxiety floating away as he smiled at her. God, this was going to be too easy. The girl was so naÃ¯ve. Anyone else could have seen straight through his act. Pinky swearing? He hadn't seen that done since the first grade but it worked like a charm on Laila.

"So," she said, breaking their fingers apart and opening her book. "Where should we start?"

"How about we start with the homework assignment for tomorrow?"

"Sounds great." She smiled at him.

Perfect. Not only was he going to get her into bed, but until then, he could get her to do his homework for him as well.

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