



MATCH ME
If
You CAN

Tiana Smith

Swoon Reads

Swoon Reads
New York

A SWOON READS BOOK

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For Brad,
You're my favorite.

one

Honestly, high school was stressful enough. Now I was supposed to worry about good grades *and* finding a date to homecoming? That kind of pressure just wasn't fair. I mean, talk about a major anxiety attack just waiting to happen.

Luckily for me, my best friend, Robyn, was notoriously good at matchmaking. And she was going to help me even if I had to blackmail her with photos from our fourth-grade talent show to get it.

Because homecoming was in two weeks and I needed a date, stat.

"What about him?" I asked, pointing toward a guy on the debate team. First period started in five minutes and we were sitting against our lockers, scouting out potential dates in the hallway. Well, I was scouting. Robyn was ignoring me. Homeroom was over, and there wasn't much time to chat

between classes. Usually I liked to be early, but desperate times called for desperate measures, and I was nothing if not desperate. “Hello?” I snapped my fingers.

Robyn sent me an annoyed look over the top of her phone.

“He’s been dating a girl on the swim team for the last three months,” she said, returning her focus to her phone. I leaned over to get a closer look, but she placed the phone against her chest. “Nice try.”

“Another matchmaking application?” I said. Given her reaction, that was pretty much the only thing it could be. She protected the privacy of her clients like an overly-aggressive goalie guarded his net.

She patted me on the head. “You’re so smart. No wonder you’re on the honor roll.”

Robyn’s matchmaking business was incredibly successful, hence her Cupid nickname. If someone wanted to utilize her mad matchmaking powers, they slid ten bucks into her locker and submitted a detailed personality test online that went to her email. After that, there was only one rule: they had to really try. When Robyn emailed them their match, they couldn’t look at the name and say “pass” without going on at least one date. They had to give it their all, too, like 100 percent try their best to make it work. And honestly, with Robyn’s girl-next-door looks and brown Bambi eyes, it was hard not to trust her.

Usually, things lasted a lot longer than one date, something she was immensely proud of. The more her couples worked, the more people were willing to go all in. Of course,

then more couples worked, so it was like a never-ending cycle of matchmaking bliss. At this point, most people submitting applications took her word as fact, believing they were soul mates even if they'd never met. Given her matchmaking fame, Robyn would save up for her car in no time.

Robyn pretended like it didn't matter. But having her own car would mean freedom—she could escape whenever she needed to. Ever since they'd had the twins, it was like her parents forgot Robyn existed. She spent more time at my house than at her own, but she always had to borrow a car to come over. And since her dad took on some extra shifts, that was getting trickier.

"Hey, what'd I miss?" Elena dropped her bag and sat between us, adjusting her skirt so it was merely revealing, rather than outright shocking. She'd moved into my neighborhood two years ago and was already ten times more popular than I'd ever be. But she still spent time with us mere mortals, even if she did typically eat lunch with the pretty people.

"Just talking about homecoming and how I don't have a date," I said. "So nothing new there."

She leaned her head against the lockers and heaved an exaggerated sigh. "You and me both. Man, I'm so tired I could literally fall asleep standing up. Last night I stayed up late memorizing lines for auditions, and now I can barely move."

None of us had homeroom together, so this short stretch between classes was one of the few chances we could meet up in the morning.

“Too bad. We’ve got a test in chemistry today,” I said. Already the halls were clearing out, with students hurrying to class. I stood up. “You coming?”

“I didn’t study.” Elena grimaced. She looked around, as if an answer key might fall from the sky. When that didn’t immediately happen, her eyes grew more furtive, darting back and forth like a caged rabbit. Then an idea seemed to hit her and an impish grin spread across her face.

Whatever she was about to do, it was probably a bad idea. I knew it, Robyn knew it, and the freshman a few feet down most likely knew it, too. But there was no stopping Elena once she put her mind to something.

Robyn stood up and we shared an uneasy look.

“Elena, what are you thinking?” I asked.

Elena got up also and leaned casually against the lockers, all traces of her earlier desperation gone. “I’m thinking we really shouldn’t be cooped up inside on a beautiful October day like this.”

It was only then that I noticed the fire alarm mounted on the wall next to us, and how Elena was eyeing it like she would the sales rack at Nordstrom.

“You can’t be serious.” I stepped forward and put my hand over the plastic cover, shielding the alarm with my body. “Is that how a student council member should act?” I didn’t think she’d actually do it, but I’d once watched her kiss a complete stranger on a dare, so really, I couldn’t be sure. “Besides, isn’t that like a felony or something?”

“You know, just because you’re in drama doesn’t mean you

need to create it.” Robyn added. They were friends—90 percent of the time—but mostly by extension. Sometimes Robyn found Elena’s attitude a little . . . over the top.

Elena pantomimed looking wounded, throwing her straight black hair over one shoulder and placing her hands over her heart. “I do *not* create drama.”

Then she shoved me out of the way, opened the alarm’s clear cover, and pushed down on the white lever inside before Robyn or I could stop her. It happened so fast I barely had time to regain my balance. Then it was too late.

Sirens blared overhead, annoyingly loud to the point where I felt like my ears would bleed from the sheer volume. It was impossible to think, which was ironically counterproductive to the sirens’ whole purpose.

“What did you just do?” I yelled, clamping my hands over my ears.

“I didn’t think it’d actually work,” she yelled back, her eyes growing wide. A lot of times Elena’s expressions were comically theatrical—I blamed her interest in acting—but one look at her face and I knew her surprise was genuine.

“Like they’d be props or something?” Robyn threw her hands in the air. “Honestly, I’m going to match you up with a rock for homecoming.” She grabbed Elena’s bag off the floor as I pushed us all down the hallway—away from the scene of the crime.

“I don’t know, everything else in this school is so old . . . I mean, we don’t even have security cameras here.”

Before she’d moved to Oregon, Elena had gone to a much

larger, more technologically advanced school in California—one that had better computers, HD televisions in every room, and lightning-fast internet. Right now, though, I bet she was glad our tiny school didn't have all the cameras and security like she was used to. We only had a few cameras at the main entrances, and every student knew how to get around them.

Elena looked back over her shoulder, then to the left and right, where a crowd of students streamed down the hallway toward the doors.

It was surreal. I'd been through fire drills before but had never experienced this gut-wrenching nervousness that I'd soon see my head—or diploma—on the cutting block.

Other students laughed as they walked through the doors leading to the parking lot. I sweated. A lot. Maybe it'd be a good thing if the sprinklers went off. At least that way, my sweaty armpits wouldn't be so noticeable.

The sirens weren't as loud outside, but my pulse still beat overtime. Students milled around the flagpole, down the sidewalk, and in between all the cars. My goal was to go as far back as possible. Maybe that would help our chances of going undetected.

But we didn't make it that far.

"Hold up, Mia." Principal Egeus seemed to appear out of nowhere, his signature stern look in full force. He had "ex-navy SEAL" written all over him. I wasn't sure if he had actually been a navy SEAL, but with his height and weight, he could have been. "A student informed me that you or



Elena might know something about”—he waved his arm in the air, encompassing all the noise and cacophony around us—“this.”

My mind had chosen the absolute worst moment to go blank, but for the life of me, I couldn't come up with a single coherent sentence. I'd been busted, and now I was done for. Goodbye journalism program at NYU; it'd been a nice thought while it lasted. Elena was supposed to be good at improv, but even she seemed at a loss for words. She'd probably be kicked off student council and could see her prom planning leverage disappearing before her eyes.

“They were in the library with me.”

It was the voice of an angel, coming at the perfect moment to save me from Principal Egeus's withering stare. But it wasn't Robyn, like I'd been expecting. She was standing next to me, looking as panicked as I felt. No, the voice had been distinctly male. I turned around to see who my savior was, and was surprised to find Vince Demetrius, our school's golden boy and probably the one person alive who might be able to convince the principal that we were clear of any wrongdoing. He was one of Elena's best friends and the star athlete of our high school's soccer team. Everyone loved him.

Everyone including, I was hoping, the principal.

“Elena needed someone to run lines with her for the auditions tonight, so I read one part and Mia read the other.” Vince flashed a smile, and I melted into a puddle. I was so grateful, I could have kissed him right then and there. Then again, that urge was nothing new.

Principal Egeus nodded once before swiping a hand over his face. "All right, the student probably saw someone else."

I bobbed my head like this was a distinct possibility. After all, I had fairly average looks. My brown hair was usually in loose waves around my face, and my eyes were kind of a murky blue; nothing noteworthy there. Elena, on the other hand . . . well, with her Hollywood looks and gorgeous skin, there was no way anyone would mistake her for anyone else, except maybe a young Vanessa Hudgens. Still, the principal nodded again, like that sealed the deal.

"Well, we should have this all sorted out soon so you can return to class," he said. "Be sure to check in with your first-period teacher so everyone's accounted for."

Then he was gone and I was floating.

"Vince, that was amazing!" Elena threw her arms around his neck. "Are you sure you won't audition for the show with me? You're a natural."

Vince shrugged his broad shoulders and released Elena, stepping back somewhat awkwardly. "My place is on a soccer field, not a stage."

"You seriously saved us back there," I said. The euphoria was making me giddy and impulsive, and without thinking about it, I reached up and placed a quick peck on his cheek. Of course, the second my heels came back down on the pavement, embarrassment caught up with me. I mean, we were somewhat friends through Elena, but really, Vince was way out of my league. He took it in stride, though, acting like that sort of thing happened all the time. And maybe it did.



“Hey, Robyn,” he said, giving her a nod. “Good job matching Shawn and Jaden together. They’re like a couple of octopuses. Octopi? Whatever. Guess you were right.”

“I was right about your friend Justin, too,” she said, looking smug. “He and Tara are so cute together I can’t stand it.”

Vince shook his head. “Yeah, they’re pretty sickening, too.”

It was obvious from his smile that he approved. And with two of his friends happily matched, it was only a matter of time before he requested Robyn’s services—if he hadn’t already.

An idea began to take shape in my mind, and I looked over at Robyn.

Elena shrugged, probably bored with the conversation, and hooked her arm through Vince’s.

“Okay, well, I can’t make a liar out of you, so now you need to run lines with me,” Elena said. “You don’t have a choice.” She began to pull him away. “With any luck, I’ll have all period to rehearse.”

Elena had one superpower, and that was how easily she could give everyone around her emotional whiplash. It was like she had zero memory of pulling the fire alarm and felt no guilt for behaving so recklessly. It was both her curse and part of her charm—Elena lived life loud and took no prisoners. Two fire trucks pulled up to the front of the high school, but Elena had already moved on.

“She seems really upset about all this,” Robyn mused, twirling a strand of her blond hair around her pointer finger. “Think we should send her a gift basket?”

That was such a typical Robyn comment. Elena kept us spontaneous, Robyn brought the laughter, and I made sure we made it out alive.

I liked having a plan. A plan for what, who knew? The zombie apocalypse? Armageddon? It didn't matter. I liked knowing what was going to happen next. And what would happen next for several weeks and even years.

And the next item on my agenda was finding a date. Maybe Robyn hoped I'd let the matter drop. But she knew me well enough to know that was never going to happen.

"Forget about Elena," I said, my earlier idea blossoming in my mind. "I know who you should match me up with for homecoming."

Robyn raised her eyebrows, but otherwise didn't comment.

"Vince," I said. I mean, Vince was the star soccer player and runner-up for homecoming king. He had blond boy-band hair that always looked amazing in pictures and a great physique that would fill out a suit perfectly. And if Robyn matched us up, I might actually have a shot.

She scrunched her eyes and looked off in the distance, like somehow the answer was there among the crowd of students mingling around us.

"Yeah, I'm not seeing it," she said finally. "Sorry."

She didn't *look* sorry.

"Come on," I said. "We have so many things in common." I began ticking the items off on my fingers. "We're both kind of overachievers in our own way, him with soccer and me

with journalism. He even reads the school newspaper—I've seen him. We care about our grades, and he's the responsible type of guy who doesn't party every night, even though he could. It makes all kinds of logical sense. The only question is, has he filled out one of your applications?"

I knew Robyn wouldn't answer me outright about Vince's application, but her silence spoke volumes. She looked away and began picking at her nails.

"You don't need another overachiever who can pencil you in on the weekends," she said. "You don't even really know him. You just like the *idea* of him. And you can't logically decide who your best match is supposed to be. There's a reason why they call it a matter of the heart, Mia. Have you ever heard that opposites attract? You'd be better with someone who's more laid-back."

"You mean, you want me to settle." I crossed my arms. "You think I couldn't possibly interest someone like him."

She shook her head. "That's not what I'm saying. Look, you don't make sense with Vince," she said, glancing around before lowering her voice. "Besides, you're going to fall hard for someone else pretty soon. I know it. Believe me, I've seen your results."

I had filled out one of her personality tests, just for fun. Robyn kept threatening to set me up on a date, and I'd never taken her up on it. Of course, now when I really wanted her to, she was being a brat.

"Who is it?" I asked. "What percentage was our match on your personality test?"



“I mean, I’ve seen *your* results and I know you. Logan hasn’t filled one out, but he’s been flirting hard practically all year. Sure, he started out kind of subtle, but he’s been laying it on pretty thick lately. You can’t pretend like you haven’t noticed.”

Oh. No. She. *Didn’t*.

“Logan?” I put as much scorn into the name as I could without drawing the attention of anyone around me. “You can’t possibly mean the same Logan who once put bubble gum in my hair and wore the same Batman t-shirt every day for an entire year. The same Logan who never takes anything seriously and teases me daily. That Logan?”

“He’s *flirting* with you, Mia. And the Batman shirt thing was in the second grade. Just think about it.”

Then she had the audacity to wink.

Yeah, that was *so* not happening.

two

I had detention during lunch, but not for my involvement with the fire alarm. I'd dodged that bullet, only to be busted for something so much less incriminating.

To be honest, I was kind of proud of myself. Detention was a new experience for me, like a rite of passage. True, it'd be a different story if I actually deserved it, or if it went on my permanent record. The fire alarm still haunted my thoughts with its screeching accusation. But detention with my best friend? For an infraction so minor even my mom would find it funny? That didn't seem so bad.

I pushed open the door, Robyn close behind me. I handed our slip to Mr. Cho at the front of the room, who eyed it lazily.

"You're both in detention because you were disrespectful to a teacher?" he asked.

Robyn snorted. "Mrs. Patterson kept calling Africa a country and Mia corrected her in front of the class. I backed her up, because hello, it's a continent. Mrs. Patterson got defensive. How is that our fault?"

Mr. Cho's lip quivered like he was holding back a laugh. He motioned for us to take a seat but otherwise didn't give us any instructions on how we were to spend our time, so we pulled out our lunches. It made no difference to me whether we ate here or in the cafeteria, as long as I had time to convince Robyn to set me up with Vince. Homecoming was only two weeks away. Time was running out before he found another date.

"So, about Vince," I said.

Robyn sighed. "Okay," she said. "I know that nothing I say is going to convince you. So I'm giving you some homework."

I set my drink on the table. "I think I've got enough of that already, thank you very much."

She kept talking like I'd never even said anything.

"You say you like logic, yeah? So write a pros-and-cons list." She pointed a finger at me. "Compare Vince and Logan. You know I'm right, you just need to see it."

Fat chance. But I'd do it to appease her. I picked up my sandwich and took a big bite.

But then Logan walked in and I stopped mid-chew.

Had Logan gotten detention simply so he could taunt me some more? That would be just like him. Or maybe Robyn had tipped him off, believing herself to be "helping." That would be just like her, too. I glanced at my friend, accusa-

tion written on my face. But she held up her hands in the universal *it wasn't me* gesture, and I guessed I believed her. Logan probably had detention a lot—he wasn't exactly known for being a great student. Yet another reason why we were total opposites and Robyn was way off in thinking we'd be a good match. And something for Logan's con list.

Logan handed his slip to Mr. Cho, who read it and frowned.

"You were late, again?"

Logan nodded once, causing his shaggy hair to fall into his eyes. He brushed it aside with a hand, saw me, and grinned.

Mr. Cho sighed. "Have a seat."

Logan pulled up a chair, situating himself to my left, across from Robyn. His arm brushed mine and I pretended not to notice.

"Let me guess," Logan said. "You got detention for . . ."—he pursed his lips as if he were deep in thought—"dog-earring a page in a library book."

I shook my head but didn't say anything. My reason for being here actually wasn't much worse than that. Which meant I was all kinds of lame, even if I'd been proud of getting detention earlier. I really needed to get a life.

He leaned back in his chair and studied me. "No hints? Okay, did you finish an assignment early and read a book when you were supposed to be working?"

It was kind of scary how well Logan knew me, which was probably how he could push my buttons so easily.

I shook my head and took another bite of my sandwich. Robyn was watching this whole exchange with entirely too much interest, so I kicked her under the table. She didn't even flinch; she just smirked.

Logan raised his eyebrows and leaned forward on an elbow. "You mean you actually did something . . . wrong?" He shook his head.

"She corrected a teacher," Robyn said, throwing a potato chip at my head. "Shocking, I know."

Logan laughed and I resisted the urge to kick Robyn again.

"Well, what about you, Mr. Hotshot?" I asked him. "Why were you late?"

He lowered his voice and whispered dramatically. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

This caused goose bumps to rise along my arms, but I ignored the sensation. Logan was up to his usual tricks again, and it got to me. Robyn might call it flirting, but I knew it for what it really was. Logan simply liked his games, and I was an easy target. I'd never seen Logan *not* behave like this toward me—which made it that much more difficult to believe he was acting out of any secret feelings he harbored. Who liked one person for that long?

I inspected the person beside me, curious as to why my best friend would think we were a good match. Sure, he was good-looking, I guess, if you were into that artsy creative look (which I wasn't). He had dimples (which, okay, were kind of cute), but he also had messy brown hair that hung over his eyes (which made him look like he had just rolled out of

bed—so not my style). His olive skin gave off the impression of a year-round tan, which I'd always been jealous of (not that I'd ever admit it).

He had a tall and lean frame, but that wasn't what I typically went for in guys. At all. Robyn knew that. I usually liked them muscular like Vince, whose chiseled abs could shred cheese. I'd give him one thing. Logan did have nice eyes. They were kind of a chocolate color, with lighter specks in them. Not that I was looking at his eyes or anything.

I startled when someone knocked on the classroom window. Elena and Vince peered through the glass, their faces distorted in the old pane.

As one, Logan, Robyn, and I looked at Mr. Cho to see his reaction. Mr. Cho glanced up, shrugged, and went back to reading *Better Homes and Gardens*.

Before he could change his mind, I jumped up from my seat and went to the window, cracking it open.

"What are you guys doing here?" I asked them, pushing against the window to see if it would open any farther.

"Providing sustenance," Vince said, passing two ice-cream sandwiches through the frame. "Sorry, man," he called to Logan. "Didn't know you were in here, too, or we'd have brought more."

I clutched the sandwiches to my chest, forgetting momentarily that this was probably not the best course of action for frozen treats. Looking over at Robyn, I tried to telepathically make her recognize the better match here. I mean, nice boy who rescued me from the principal, bought me ice

cream, and had an amazing soccer body, or trouble boy who landed in detention and probably wouldn't want to go to homecoming even if it meant supporting a school event? It was an easy decision, one that Vince won hands-down.

But either my best-friend telepathy wasn't working, or Robyn chose to ignore it. She popped a potato chip in her mouth and crunched it loudly.

"I'm good," she said. "Logan can have mine." But Logan shook his head, too, so I was left holding two slightly squishy ice-cream sandwiches.

"And we came to bust you out of here," Elena said, stretching up on her toes to better lean in through the window frame. "Come on, Mr. Cho, you know they aren't hardened criminals. What do you say?"

Elena did her best innocent pout, the expression she'd perfected so much that it would one day be her ticket to Hollywood.

Mr. Cho pursed his lips. Eventually he sighed, placed his magazine on the desk, and stood up. The thrill of victory coursed through my veins.

"I don't want to be here, either. All of you go enjoy the rest of lunch," he said, glancing between the three of us. "But I get the extra ice-cream sandwich."

He was releasing Logan also. But why? If anyone deserved to be here, it was Logan for repeatedly being late.

I guessed it didn't really matter. I still got out of detention. Plus, I'd gotten a free ice-cream sandwich out of the deal, which was a bonus. I'd experienced my rite of passage

and was now free to crush on the beautiful boy bearing gifts. It was a win-win in my book. Of course, now that we'd be hanging out with Vince, I couldn't exactly talk to Robyn about him. I'd have to find another time to convince her to set us up. It wasn't like I'd forget about it, and the clock was ticking.

Robyn scowled at me as she picked up her lunch—maybe she'd finally caught on to my telepathy—but it lacked any real sting. I handed the extra ice-cream sandwich off to Mr. Cho and tore open the wrapper on mine, taking a celebratory bite.

Logan hadn't unpacked anything, so he simply grabbed his bag from off the floor and slung it over one shoulder.

"Catch you later," he said as he passed me. "Might even be sooner than you think."

Then he walked away, not looking back.

three

The weekend was calling my name. I just had to get through journalism first. After the excitement of detention, the rest of my day had been tedious, and I was looking forward to vegging out in front of Netflix all night. I walked through the classroom door and stopped dead in my tracks. Elena bumped into me from behind.

“What’s he doing here?” I asked, nodding in the direction of the back corner.

“Logan?” Elena said. “I don’t know. It’s a little late in the year to change schedules.”

So this was what Logan had been hinting at. I smelled a fish, and that fish had Robyn’s name written all over it. Sure, she supposedly didn’t set people up without their permission, but there was always a first time.

I didn’t say anything else as I navigated my way to my

seat. Elena plopped her books on the table next to me, and together we stared at the person who dared intrude on our happy journalism family.

Robyn swept in at the last minute, claiming the seat to my left and dropping her books on the table with a loud thump. This was one reason journalism was my favorite class—it was the only one Robyn, Elena, and I had together.

“All right, everybody, listen up!” Mr. Quince called from the front of the classroom. “I’d like you all to welcome Logan to the team. He’ll be the new photographer for the Athens High *Herald*.”

From where he stood, leaning against the wall, Logan gave a small wave in acknowledgment. Did he even *read* the paper?

“Spencer bit off more than he could chew with his AP classes, so he had to leave our staff. You guys have no idea how hard it was to find a photographer who also had a free eighth period, so please be nice to him.”

Well, that explained a few things. But Spencer wasn’t just the photographer—he also wrote for the sports section. I wondered who Mr. Quince would bully into taking on an additional article. Our teacher stood impatiently at the front of the class, his eyebrows raised in a silent question. “Well, any takers on the sports column?”

I pictured Vince in his soccer shorts, and I couldn’t help but smile in appreciation.

“I like sports, sir,” I said, raising my hand.

He didn't hesitate. "Good. You'll cover Spencer's column. There's a game tomorrow night. Don't miss it."

He cleared his throat. "Now for a bit of bad news," Mr. Quince said. "Or good, if you're a glass-half-full kind of person. But circulation has been somewhat down this year, and the school is debating whether the cost of running a high school paper is worth it. They're considering getting rid of the paper, or drastically cutting down on the number of issues. Most of our readers are online, which doesn't cost to print, but cutting back would mean they wouldn't have to pay me as much for formatting and the funds could go toward the football team."

I wondered how this could possibly be considered good news, and judging from the confused looks going on around me, I wasn't the only one. If they shut down the paper, Mr. Quince would still have a job as our teacher, but I already knew the journalism basics he taught at the beginning of each class. I took this course for the real-life paper experience. I was counting on the fact that college newspapers looked for that kind of thing. And the sporadic class assignments Mr. Quince handed out unrelated to the paper weren't enough to get me that.

"I need your creativity now more than ever. Please let me know if you have any ideas on how to increase readership of our paper, or ways to convince the administration of the efficacy of our program. I'm working on creating a contest and will let you know when I have more details. For now, keep up the good work."

Mr. Quince clapped his hands twice. “No lesson today. Work on the inverted pyramid method in your next pieces. The next paper goes to bed by eleven on Saturday, so don’t dawdle, people.” Everyone went back to their individual projects, looking unfazed. Except for me. Without the high school paper, could I still get scholarships? How could I get on a college paper without experience? And how come no one acted nearly as concerned as I felt?

Joey drummed his fingers on the table as he walked by. “Now you’re doing sports?” he asked me. Everything was a joke to him, which was appropriate, since he drew the comics for the newspaper. “I know you love journalism and all, but you don’t even like sports.”

“Plus, you already write an opinion piece and do the daily videos for school announcements,” Robyn added. She liked to take Joey’s side, no matter what argument he was making. I blamed his green eyes. Robyn had a thing for those.

I slumped back in my chair.

“Well, it’s not like the video announcements really count as reporting,” I said. Sure, they got me comfortable in front of a camera, but I didn’t want to be a television reporter. I wanted to be a journalist, writing the news stories that really mattered. I couldn’t tell them I’d volunteered only so I could see Vince play, though. It was too embarrassing.

Joey left and Robyn watched him go. Logan came over to where we sat. He pulled a chair from a nearby table and sat on it backward, his arms folded across the back as he smiled at me.

“So,” he said, drawing out the word.

“So?” I repeated. I refused to look over at Robyn. She was so off base in thinking Logan flirted with me. *Taunted* sounded more accurate to me.

“It looks like you’ll be covering the soccer game tomorrow night.”

“Looks like it.”

He pulled a black gel pen out of his pocket. I barely had time to register surprise when he reached across the table, took my hand, and started writing on my palm.

“Hey! What do you think you’re doing?” I asked, trying to pull my arm away.

“Careful, you don’t want to mess it up,” he said, holding tight. The pen tickled my palm and I tried not to laugh. After all, I was supposed to be angry, and laughing kind of spoiled the effect.

“You done yet?” I asked.

In answer, he let go of my wrist and capped the pen. My hand tingled where he had held it, and I quickly pulled it back, inspecting his work. His name and phone number covered my palm. Well, that was just great.

“Is this your weird way of asking me out?” I asked, staring at my hand. I was so going to chew Robyn out for this later. She’d probably told him to up his game. Robyn busied herself to my left, flipping between notebooks like she wasn’t paying attention to us at all.

“No. Is that your way of saying you want me to?”

Logan smirked, and I balled up my other hand into a fist,

but he pulled away before I could hit his shoulder. He held up his hands in surrender.

“We’ll have to work together on your sports piece. You can call me to let me know what shots you’ll need.”

“Couldn’t you just email me some standard soccer pictures from the game?” I said. “You know, players kicking the ball and stuff.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” he asked. Then he stood up with a smirk, pushed his chair back under the table, and walked away.

I still refused to look at Robyn. Instead I glanced over at Elena, who was watching me with one eyebrow raised.

“What?” I asked, daring her to comment.

“I think someone likes you,” she said in a singsong voice. Robyn laughed and tried to turn it into a cough.

“And I think the whiteboard marker fumes are going to your head,” I said. “We have to work together for the article, that’s all.”

I was doing damage control, because Elena ran the gossip column. Since she was on student council, she knew a lot of the issues going on around the school. Plus, drama and gossip kind of came hand in hand, so it made sense. I didn’t need her starting any rumors and ruining my chances with Vince, though. Logically, he was still my best bet for homecoming.

Logan and I were more likely to be voted “polar opposites” in the school yearbook than “cutest couple.” Even if we survived the dance, it could never go anywhere after that.

Besides, I didn't need a slacker date who'd show up late with bedhead, which seemed like something Logan would do. If he went to the dance at all. It'd be best to ignore him altogether.

"Uh-huh," Elena said. "Then why don't I see him giving his number to anyone else?"

"Told you so," Robyn said. Even the way she flipped through her notebook looked smug.

"You're delusional," I said to them both. They let the conversation drop, but occasionally I'd see Elena making kissy faces at me and looking pointedly in Logan's direction. It was like she was wanting to stir up trouble, which now that I thought about it, was pretty typical.

Robyn worked on her Dear Robyn column while I plotted ways to kill her in her sleep. If she'd convinced Logan to pull that stunt with the gel pen, I'd put those fourth-grade talent show pictures in next week's paper. Who knew, maybe it'd help with newspaper circulation and solve the problem of discontinuing our paper.

Most everyone was busy working on their articles for tomorrow's deadline—in addition to the other weekly nights, Mr. Quince came in on Saturdays to submit the next issue to the printer—but I'd already finished my opinion piece. I didn't want to write about a game that hadn't happened yet, so I used my class time as productively as possible (doodling in my notebook and planning what dress would best match Vince's eyes). The more I thought about the prospect of homecoming with Vince, the more excited I got.

Ten minutes before class ended, I heard Mr. Quince call my name.

“Mia, don’t you have to leave for announcements?”

I jerked my head from my hand and stood up so fast my chair fell over. I was late. The last five minutes of each school day were reserved for school announcements, and it would take me at least five minutes to make it to the office. Tania, the girl who did them with me, was probably breathing into a brown paper bag by now. I grabbed my books and ran out of the room.

A teacher in the hall gave me an odd look as I tore past, my shoes slapping against the linoleum. At least I’d worn flats. I rounded the corner and hurtled into the office, nearly bowling over the receptionist.

“I know, I know, I’m sorry,” I said, out of breath. “Let’s go.”

I slid into my chair, barely glancing at Tania, who was fidgeting with the papers on the desk in front of us. The scowling receptionist hit the button on the recorder, and we were live to over a hundred classrooms in Athens High.

Tania did a double take when she looked at me, no doubt because I’d run harder in the last few minutes than I had in a whole month of gym. I wasn’t exactly the athletic type. My face was probably red enough to be mistaken for a fire hydrant.

Tania’s eyes were wide as she looked back at the live camera. She slid the papers over to me, trying to catch my eye, but I couldn’t let her capture my attention when I needed to focus on the announcements. I glanced through the papers

as she started talking about the north parking lot and how it was reserved for seniors only. By the time she got to the plea for people to stop putting their gum under the desks, I had placed the papers to the side.

“So please stop being gross,” she said, and turned to me.

I plastered on my hundred-kilowatt smile and addressed the camera.

“The firefighters have determined that the alarm this morning was a prank or accident, and there’s nothing to worry about there.” I managed to keep a straight face and barreled right on to the next announcement without blinking an eye. Go me. “The varsity soccer team is playing the Jordan Knights tomorrow at seven, so bring your school spirit and support your Lions,” I said. “Don’t forget that the concessions stand only takes cash, so come prepared. Other than that, have a great weekend, and don’t do anything stupid.”

Tania and I smiled at the camera in silence. This was always the awkward part—waiting for the receptionist to turn the camera off. After five beats of silence, Tania turned to me.

“So, do you have a crush on Logan, or what?” she asked.

“What? No!” Robyn. Was. Dead. Meat. She was spreading rumors about us? Sure, he’d been kind of flirty. Maybe? But that was just who he was—a tease. I could tell Tania didn’t believe me, so I scrambled for anything that might get her off my back. “I have a thing for Vince, not Logan. Jeez, what gave you that idea?”

She pointed to my face.

“You have Logan’s name and phone number written across

your cheek. It's backward, though, so it took me a second to figure it out."

My eyes widened and my hand flew to my face—the same hand that Logan had written on earlier. It didn't take a genius to figure out that I had rested my head on my hand and the ink had transferred.

I gasped. "Why didn't you tell me? Give me a mirror."

"Because you were late and we started as soon as you ran in here," she said, handing me a small compact.

I flipped it open and groaned when I saw my reflection. "It was like this the whole time?" I asked. "That's so embarrassing." My chances with Vince were rapidly dwindling. Now Robyn would *have* to step in. I tried rubbing at the ink, but that did nothing.

"Ummm . . . ladies?" The receptionist cleared her throat.

"Can't you see I'm in the middle of a crisis?" I asked. I pulled at my cheeks and made a hideous face in the mirror. I looked like a circus freak.

"Ladies . . . the recorder is still on. You're live."

That got my attention. My eyes flew to the recorder, where the blinking red light seemed to mock my mortification.

"What?" It came out as a squeak.

"I'm sorry, the button was stuck . . ." Her voice trailed off, and she shrugged in apology.

"Ummm . . ." My voice was wobbly, so I tried to sound confident. "It's okay, we were practicing a skit. Yes, everyone please come to the soccer game, where you can all paint your faces, but remember not to use pens . . ."

The receptionist pushed the button hard and the light turned off.

“Mia, stop hyperventilating,” Tania said. I whipped around to face her. “Wow, your eyes are really wide. It’s okay, just calm down.”

“Calm down?” I said. “Calm down?” My voice was too high, too nervous. “I just announced to the entire school that I have a crush on Vince, and, as if that weren’t enough, my face looks like *this!*” I jabbed a finger at my cheek and held it there for emphasis. Tania reached out and pulled my shaking hand back to my lap.

“People will forget all about it over the weekend.”

I didn’t bother correcting her. This was high school. She should know better. No one forgot anything. Ever.

I put my head on the table and covered it with my arms. Tania patted my back awkwardly, like I was a dog she suspected had fleas. Then she picked up her bag and left me to my misery.

My thoughts were darker than the pen scrawled across my palm (and, lest I forget, my face). There was no way I’d live this down. I’d be the brunt of every joke, the laughing-stock of the junior class. And I could kiss homecoming goodbye, especially with someone like Vince. I banged my head against the table a few times before giving up. It was hopeless. Nothing could save me now.

I’d just committed social suicide.

four

I pulled a Moaning Myrtle and hid out in a bathroom stall for the next half hour, waiting for people to clear the halls. It was the only safe place. On my way from the office, everyone had laughed at me, and that wasn't an exaggeration. It was like a wave—one that only got louder as people stopped to stare. On the plus side, at least they weren't talking about me behind my back. On the downside, it was only because they were too busy laughing at my face.

One girl I didn't recognize said, "I feel so bad for her," and I almost tackle-hugged her out of gratitude. But that was before she finished her statement with, "Vince is obviously way out of her league."

Now, safely sequestered in a bathroom, I occasionally heard girls come and go, but after a while, the noise dwindled down.

To top it all off, I'd gotten my entire shirt wet when I tried to stick the side of my face under the faucet. Go me.

My phone dinged with a text message from Robyn.

—How're you holding up? Wanna get ice cream?

Yes, I did, but eating my feelings wouldn't solve my problems. Maybe I'd feel better if Vince asked me to homecoming. At least then, people would stop gossiping about me.

There in the Athens High girls' bathroom, time seemed to slow down. This actually could be the answer to my problems. The thought lodged in my brain and strangled out all common sense. If Vince asked me out, it wouldn't matter that I had announced my crush to the school. It wouldn't matter that I'd had Logan's name scrawled across my cheek. It wouldn't matter because I'd be dating the most popular guy in the junior class.

Once I'd thought of it, I couldn't ignore it. The thought of facing everyone made me want to shrivel up and die, but if I could change things, well, that was another story. I texted Robyn back.

—No ice cream. But now you have to match me with Vince. It's the only way to save face. Please, please, please.

Her response was immediate.

—*Save face? I didn't think you'd be ready to make puns about this yet. ;)*

I scowled at my phone, even though she couldn't see it, and responded.

—*Not. Helping.*

I tried to wait patiently for her to text me back, but couldn't help myself from nervously tapping on the sink.

—*You know I love you, but no can do. It wouldn't be fair to him. Plus, that would give me loads of bad business karma. Don't worry, I'll get things worked out with your homecoming date soon.*

Yeah. That was what I was worried about. And if Robyn was going to keep pushing Logan on me, I needed to act fast.

A janitor came into the bathroom and gave me a sympathetic smile that made me want to curl up in the fetal position. If a grown-up felt sorry for me, I really was officially at the bottom of the social ladder. I put my phone away and tried to act normal, but there was no normal for this situation.

"Have you tried using hand sanitizer?" the janitor asked. "That's what I used on my three-year-old when she got into the markers."

I wanted to laugh, but the comparison also made me want

to cry. Instead I just mumbled, “Thanks,” and pretended to be invisible. The janitor took the hint, checked off the paper that said the bathrooms were clean enough, and left without another word. I eyed the hand sanitizer dispenser that was mounted on the wall and squared my shoulders. I was going to get this pen off my face, and then I was going to take charge of my life by matching myself with Vince. I knew how Robyn’s matchmaking business worked, and I knew how she emailed results back to her clients. All I needed to do was log on to her email and seal the deal.

My stomach squeezed uncomfortably at the thought of going behind my best friend’s back, but I chose to ignore it. I also chose to ignore what Robyn had said about Logan, because right now, I needed concrete solutions, not crazy theories.

Robyn was forcing my hand. Friendship should come before work. Besides, it was one measly date—what could possibly go wrong?

“All right, let’s see what you can do,” I said to the hand sanitizer. Then I started pumping.

It did the trick. My cheek was red from all the rubbing, but it was better than the alternative. I could show my face in public again. Now I just needed a game plan. If I logged in from my phone, Robyn might get an alert of suspicious behavior on her account. I needed to log in from a device she typically used. I could go to her house, but she’d ask too many questions. No, I needed somewhere close.

Somewhere like the computer lab.

I picked up my bag and made my way there, all the while trying to look inconspicuous but failing miserably. Being bad was a whole lot more stressful than it looked. I practically sweated guilt as I walked down the hall.

Luckily, there weren't many people around to see. The few students who were still there gave silent smirks, but I ignored them.

I peeked around the corner of the computer lab and watched the teacher, Ms. Lackey, through the door. She checked her watch and closed the lid of her laptop, sliding it into her bag before standing up. I'd hidden out in the bathroom for so long that even the teachers were leaving. She turned off the light, closed the door, and locked it before heading down the hall, away from my hiding place.

Now was my chance.

As soon as she was out of sight, I rounded the corner and studied the lock. It was the cheap, run-of-the-mill kind, which meant Robyn's old trick would work.

When we were eight, Robyn went through a detective phase, reading every Nancy Drew book she could get from the library. From there, it blossomed into a full-blown obsession with fingerprinting kits, invisible ink, secret codes, and yes, lock picking. I'd been relieved when she moved on to other interests, but now I was glad for the knowledge I'd gleaned from her.

I dropped my bag on the floor and rooted through it until I found my student ID. Then I wiggled the card in between the lock and doorframe, smiling when the door swung open.

It was almost too easy. Of course, getting caught would put a damper on things, so I stepped inside and quietly closed the door behind me, leaving the lights off.

I went to the corner Robyn liked and powered the computer on, nervously tapping my fingers on the desk. I couldn't help but check the window every other minute to make sure no one saw me. At this rate, I'd have a crick in my neck before I even got to the main screen.

After what seemed like a decade and a half, the lock screen came up and prompted me for a password. I used Robyn's and waited while the computer logged me, I mean her, on.

I was chewing my lips so much I'd need a pound of lip balm to undo all the damage. Picturing Robyn's face made me physically nauseous. But this was the only option. Gossip grows the longer it goes unchecked, and I didn't need people talking about me several years from now at our high school reunion.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I opened her email and found Vince's matchmaking application. I clicked reply and copied over the template she used whenever she responded to clients. Then I wrote my name on the blank line. The cursor blinked again and again, silently accusing me with every heartbeat.

Of course, a regular date with Vince might not make everyone forget about my little performance from earlier. It'd have to be something big. I hadn't considered it before, but most students probably wouldn't even know if we went out

one time, and Robyn's contract only required one date. I added a line at the end of Robyn's template. *I think homecoming would be a great place to start*, I wrote. Then I took a deep breath, the cursor hovering over the send button.

I could feel my heartbeat slow down with the knowledge that soon everything would go back to normal. Plus, I'd have a hot date to homecoming.

I jumped when someone behind me cleared their throat. Instinctively, my hands clenched, my finger pressed down on the button, and the email was sent.

What had I done?

"Well, well, what do we have here? Mia Taylor breaking the rules?"

I whipped around in the chair so fast I almost fell on the floor.

"Logan! What are you doing here?" I was mortified that he'd caught me doing something I shouldn't, but more importantly, that he was seeing me with my face scrubbed raw, free of makeup, one side redder than the other, with a wet shirt thrown in for good measure. It wasn't fair that he could stand there looking so casually cool while I looked like something the cat had thrown up. If he'd been less good-looking, maybe my ego wouldn't be as bruised, but all I could do now was pretend like it didn't bother me.

"I asked you first," he said, arms crossed over his chest. He leaned on the doorframe, the *open* doorframe, his shoulders taking up nearly the entire space.

"Research," I said.

He crossed the room to me and looked over my shoulder at the computer screen. I hastily archived Vince's email, but it was too late.

"Uh-huh. And what type of research involves stalking poor unsuspecting guys?" His face was so close to mine I could feel his breath on my neck.

"He's hardly unsuspecting, thanks to you," I muttered, closing the program. I logged out and pushed back from the desk. "If you absolutely must know, I needed to learn his full name and birthday . . . for the sports article I'm writing." Any minute now, Logan was going to call me out on my horrible lying skills, I knew it. But he nodded like my answer made perfect sense.

"And you couldn't just ask him? I mean, the guy's a tool, but he wouldn't give you the cold shoulder." His tone was tense, like he'd been holding back something else.

I raised my eyebrows. "You obviously don't like him," I said. "What's that all about?"

Logan looked away. "It's not that. He's decent enough. It's just . . . it's like we're always competing with each other, and he always gets what I want."

I waited, sensing there was more to it.

He sighed. "Back in third grade, he won a community art competition and I came in second by one point. In eighth, he got to have a free period as a teacher's aide while I had to endure another year of PE, even though I did extracurricular sports, too. Freshman year he won that sports essay contest and got to pick the winning mascot design for our school."

“Poor baby,” I said, puckering my lips to show I was kidding. “You’re still mad about him winning an art competition in third grade?”

“No,” Logan said. “It’s just that he keeps on doing it.”

“Oh?” I smiled. “What does he have now that you want?”

Logan didn’t answer. He just looked at me. I changed the subject.

“So,” I said, picking up my bag and slinging it over my shoulder. “Do you have a crush on the computer lab teacher or is there some other reason why you’re here?”

“You have quite the interest in my love life lately, don’t you?” he said, and I felt my cheeks go hot. “First you think I’m asking you out and now you think I’m into cougars?” He tsked. “You couldn’t just stop at publicly embarrassing me over the announcements?”

“I didn’t mean to. Honestly.” Was that too apologetic? I didn’t want to encourage him. What if Robyn had said something to him? About me? I cleared my throat and opted for a more formal apology. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to embarrass you or reject you over the announcements or anything.”

He smiled, and I fiddled with the computer mouse. Well, this was officially awkward. I stood up and tried to brush past him, but he was focusing on something else and didn’t notice my attempt to leave. Because he didn’t step back like I was expecting, I clumsily tried to scoot between him and the desk, and had to put a hand on his chest to keep from falling over. I hastily snatched it back, but not before noticing that Logan’s muscles were more defined than Webster’s Dictionary.

“Ummm, excuse me,” I said.

“I guess I’ll see you at the game tomorrow?” he asked as he slid into the seat and logged on to the computer.

I hovered uncertainly by the desk, torn between getting out of here as fast as I could and wanting to see what Logan was up to. What was he doing here after computer lab hours? Would he rat me out to the lab teacher? Probably not, but it wouldn’t hurt to be sure. Besides, I couldn’t leave without knowing why he was here. It was the reporter in my blood that demanded answers.

“How’d you unlock the computer lab door?” I asked, placing a hand on my hip. I knew for a fact it had closed behind me.

“I have a key.”

“What?” I leaned in without thinking about it.

He raised his eyebrows. “Unlike you, I’m actually supposed to be here,” he said. Then he smiled, which took the sting out of the words. I realized how close I was standing to him and took a step back. He didn’t comment on it, but he was still smiling as he turned back to the computer and clicked on a file. “I’m uploading some pictures to the server so the yearbook staff can access them. There are too many to send via email, so once a week or so I’ll upload some photos I took and they’ll sort and categorize them throughout the year.”

“Don’t you need to tell them who’s who?” I asked.

“Nah, I’m just the photographer. Captioning the photos is their job.” He pulled out a cord, which he used to attach his camera to the laptop, and clicked a few more things.

“Well, that explains why last year they labeled me as Elena.” I slumped into a chair beside him and pulled one foot beneath me. He glanced at me sideways but didn’t comment on the fact that I was staying. If he’d asked why, I wouldn’t have had an answer.

“Hey, Elena’s pretty hot. I’d take it as a compliment,” he said. I shifted on my seat, trying not to read too much into his comment. Did he think I wasn’t hot? Why did that thought make me upset? I tried to tell myself that no one would like to hear they weren’t considered attractive. It had nothing to do with Logan himself or how hot *he* was. To most girls at least. Not me.

The door to the computer lab opened, and Logan and I jumped in our seats.

“Mia?” Ms. Lackey said. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

“Ummm.” I hesitated. My heart beat loud in my ears and I could almost picture my school record going up in flames. First detention, now this.

“She’s with me,” Logan said.

I felt my cheeks grow warm.

“I mean, she’s here on my invitation. She was curious about my photography.” He nudged me in the side and wagged his eyebrows. “She was dying to see my work.”

Personally, I thought he was laying it on pretty thick. There was no way Ms. Lackey would buy that. But she surprised me by saying, “Oh, I guess that’s all right then.” She smiled in a way that made it seem like she suspected we were hiding something else, and inside, I wanted to die.

Then she walked over to the desk and started rummaging

through the papers there. "I think I left my phone here. Aha!" She held up a bright pink phone in triumph. "Okay, have a good weekend, and don't forget to shut the computer down when you leave."

She was gone before I even had a chance to realize I'd been holding my breath. I let it out in a whoosh.

"I totally saved you back there. You owe me." Logan poked me in the side.

"Do not," I said.

"Do so." His smile was so deep his dimples were showing, and I felt my resolve weaken.

"Fine, fine. Thank you for saving me. There, you happy?"

He held his hand in the air, like he was waiting for something more. "And?"

"And?" I repeated. "I guess I sort of owe you. Maybe. What do you want?"

"Nope, I'm not going to say now. I get to hold it over you and call in a favor whenever I want."

I scowled. "Way to take advantage of the situation."

"Agreed?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Agreed." I sighed, shaking it.

I had a feeling I was going to regret this.

five

Elena straightened her skirt and then pushed her jacket into my arms. Robyn stood by my side, her eyes scanning the soccer field like it was some sort of complicated equation. I felt the same way.

“I’m going to grab some popcorn. Do something useful and watch my jacket, okay?” Elena asked before taking a step down the bleachers toward the concession stand down at the edge of the soccer field. “Oh, and Mia, I have a feeling you’ll want to keep an eye on the announcer before the game starts,” she threw over her shoulder. She turned back around so fast I couldn’t see her face, but her voice sounded strange to me. Maybe because no one could run down the bleachers without sounding like they had hiccups.

I’d dragged Robyn along for emotional support, since neither of us were exactly sporty. Even though I’d carpooled

with Elena, I knew she'd spend most of her time at the game talking with people more popular than me. Hence the need for backup. Robyn had met us here, but she wasn't happy about it. She kept checking the time on her phone, like that might somehow speed up the game, which hadn't even started.

The bleachers were filling up now, and the soccer players were probably in the locker room doing whatever it was they did there, but that didn't stop me from craning my neck to look for Vince.

I'd emailed him yesterday and nothing had come from it. The announcer wasn't doing anything interesting, despite Elena's strange advice, so I focused on finding a seat.

"Over there?" I pointed to a spot apart from the gathering crowd. The failure of my little email experiment yesterday made me want to pull my hair in front of my face and hide from all the students now glancing my way. I didn't need them mocking me any more for my outburst on the announcements. Even Elena had been acting strange around me.

I wondered if my email to Vince had gone to spam. A whole day had gone by, twenty-four hours in which he could have asked me out, but no. Nothing. All I could do was find a seat and pretend like it didn't matter all that much that I'd basically been publicly rejected. Because I'd announced my crush to the school, and Vince hadn't said a word.

Robyn gave me a sideways glance. "Sure, we can sit way back in the nosebleed section. It's not like I actually wanted to see the game or anything." She knew I was hiding out. Sometimes I hated how well she could read me.

“Be honest, you couldn’t care less about watching the game,” I said as we walked over to the bench in question. “You’ve checked your phone obsessively since getting here.”

Good thing nothing had come of the email. I had big-time nightmares imagining Robyn’s reaction, which made me regret all of yesterday’s decisions 100 percent. Okay, more like 80 percent. She’d never let me live it down. Maybe there was still time for me to email Vince, explain I’d sent the wrong name, and then delete both emails so Robyn would never know. Part of me wondered if she’d already figured out what I’d done. Sure, I’d archived the email so it was no longer in her inbox, the place she kept her unanswered matchmaking applications. But how often did she check her old emails? And how could I not have considered that before?

I slumped to the bench and set Elena’s jacket at our feet. My notebook lay unopened on my lap with a ballpoint pen attached. I didn’t really need them. Staying up so late last night waiting for Vince to call had given me an opportunity to write not one, but two sports articles—one if they won, and one if they lost. They were basically just a profile of Vince and how amazing he was, so I didn’t need many specifics of tonight’s game. All I needed to do was insert the final score and a few random details and I’d be good to go. I’d even emailed them to myself so that I could submit them from the school in case Vince wanted to hang out after the game. A girl could dream, couldn’t she?

Scanning the crowd, I tried not to notice how many people were looking in my direction.

“Ignore them,” Robyn said, noticing my preoccupation.
“Who cares what they think?”

“Easy for you to say,” I muttered. Seriously, how was Robyn always so sure of herself? If someone told me purple hair was in style, I’d have dyed my own in a heartbeat.

A freshman I didn’t know was staring me down, laughing with her friends. I quickly looked back at the field, feigning a sudden interest in the soccer net. Very convincing, I was sure. I was focusing so hard, I jumped when someone sat down beside me.

“What’s so fascinating about the soccer goal?” Logan asked.

“Ummm . . .” I scooted an inch to my left, away from Logan, but Robyn’s presence prevented me from going farther.

She didn’t move down.

“The metal is so shiny, don’t you think?” Mentally, I slapped myself. Seriously? *Shiny* was the best I could come up with?

Good one, my inner thoughts taunted.

Shut up, I thought back.

Logan raised his eyebrows, but otherwise didn’t say anything except to nod at Robyn. A camera hung from his neck, a big professional kind. He pulled it up to his eye and took a few shots of the field. Maybe he was testing the lighting. I heard photographers did things like that. The shutter sounded loud in the silence between us. Then he angled his body and took a few shots of my face before I could bat his hand away.

“Hey!” I said. “No fair, I didn’t even do my hair today.” Not true. Knowing I’d be seeing Vince, I had taken about an hour making sure I looked perfect. “Besides, that’s my bad side.”

Logan chuckled. “You don’t have a bad side.”

Robyn elbowed me and was smiling so wide she gave off distinct Cheshire cat vibes.

My eyes dropped to my notebook as I tried to control the blush creeping up my neck. I shouldn’t have felt flattered by his comment. Especially because he probably didn’t even mean it. Logan began taking pictures of the students milling around, and I was spared from answering. People began filling the stands, and I fiddled with my notebook to avoid their stares. Robyn scrolled through Instagram, obviously pretending to check out of our conversation so Logan and I could talk more. Joke was on her, because I didn’t think Logan and I had anything to talk about.

“So, why’d you volunteer to take over Spencer’s section? Do you even like sports?” Logan adjusted some of the settings on his camera.

“Sure,” I said, eyeing our soccer team, which was running onto the field. Of course I liked what I saw there. I mean, I would probably like it a lot more if it were warmer outside. Or if I had a firmer grasp of what the rules were.

Okay, so maybe I didn’t really like soccer, but so what?

“The game is about to start, so shush,” I said.

“That’s pretty much the exact opposite of what you’re supposed to do at a sports game,” Logan said, standing up and

letting out a whoop. He pumped his fist in the air and I grinned at how uninhibited he was. He was a lot like Robyn, in that neither of them seemed to care what anyone around them thought. But just because I liked that quality in my best friend didn't mean Logan and I would be good together. Not even close. Besides, Vince had the same kind of confidence. Plus an amazing body, which was like ten extra points in his favor.

The air pulsed with energy as the students around us cheered. I'd never been to a game before, but it was almost impossible not to feel optimistic here. Once Vince fell for me, everything would fall into place. That is, if the email hadn't gone to spam. My smile dropped again.

"Where's Vince?" I asked.

"What? Don't you recognize your soul mate?" Logan's voice dripped with sarcasm as he sat back down. Robyn shielded her eyes with a hand, searching through the players.

"Hey, they're all wearing the same uniform, so excuse me if they look alike."

"You're the one who wanted to sit in the nosebleed section," Robyn said. "You can barely see anything from up here."

"Vince is number twelve, the one over there by the announcer." Logan pointed to the opposite side of the field, away from the majority of the players on the bench.

"What's he doing over there?" I asked. "Isn't the game supposed to start soon?"

“We still have a few minutes until the coin toss,” Logan said, but his eyebrows were drawn together in confusion. I wasn’t the only one wondering what Vince was up to.

Then Vince pulled a portable mic seemingly out of nowhere, and his voice echoed throughout the stadium.

“This one goes out to a very special lady,” he said, and I felt like all the breath had been squeezed out of my lungs. Nervousness that he meant me. Nervousness that he *didn’t*.

“Mia.” He held a hand over his eyes to scan the bleachers, then he pointed directly at me. I remembered what Elena had said about watching the announcer, but my neighbor was still nowhere in sight. The concession line snaked around the corner of the field, though, so chances were she’d been caught unawares by the force of teenage appetites. Either that or she’d found someone better to sit with, which was also a possibility.

Then Vince began to speak into the microphone again.

“Mia Taylor, she’s the one. One who makes my heartbeat drum.”

Oh. My. Word. It was *poetry*. Poetry put to a cheer. Vince even did a few kicks and halfhearted dance moves for good measure. A smile stretched across my face. It was kind of a tradition at our school to ask people to dances in big, over-the-top ways. Classes were often interrupted, and the more attention it got you on social media, the better. This meant Vince *had* gotten the email, and all my problems were about to be solved.

Maybe now, people wouldn't be staring at me with pity. Logan's face was a picture of disgust and incredulity, so I tried to ignore him. He was too rigid for a soccer game, sitting there like a statue. Robyn was eyeing me skeptically, and I wondered again how frequently she checked her archived emails. Did she know what I'd done? No. Because Robyn never hid her feelings, and if she knew, she'd definitely have feelings to express.

What had I done? Had I gotten Vince only to alienate my best friend? Why had I thought that was a good idea? There was no hiding it now. A panicked feeling bloomed from my chest, spreading from my core like a stain, and I stopped smiling.

"She's so hot, just need to say, that she takes my breath away. Homecoming's two weeks away, please be my date, what do you say?"

Everyone in the bleachers watched me as Vince did jazz hands. I could have done jazz hands right alongside him. Vince had asked me to homecoming! Sure, he was only doing it because he thought Robyn had matched us together, when in fact, Robyn had no idea. And it made sense why he'd gone all out. He didn't have a reason to doubt her methods, not when two of his friends had been happily matched by her and were now disgustingly in love. Robyn wasn't convinced, though. She was watching me with furrowed brows.

I put a hand up to my cheek, and it felt like my entire face could roast a marshmallow. Vince was still standing there waiting for my answer, so when his eyes connected with

mine, I hastily nodded my acceptance. He whooped into the microphone and the audience burst into applause.

Turning to the crowd, he gave a lopsided smile that somehow made him look adorable and provocative at the same time. He waved to everyone like they were his personal fans come to watch him perform.

It took me a moment to realize that beside me, Logan and Robyn were the only ones not clapping.

“Well, that was . . . interesting,” Logan said.

The rest of the crowd turned their attention away from me, and I felt myself breathe a bit easier.

Robyn made a sound in the back of her throat. “I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but maybe he asked you simply because he’s trying to help you save face. You know, from the announcement thing?”

She turned to look at me and I almost stopped breathing. She still hadn’t figured it out.

“You mean like a pity date?” Logan asked. He shrugged, and I could feel his arm move next to mine. “No, Mia doesn’t need those.” I was already having a hard time getting my heartbeat under control, and Logan wasn’t helping.

“Well, it’s definitely the most romantic thing anyone has ever done for me,” I said, letting out a shaky laugh.

“Romantic?” Logan asked. “You looked like you were going to pass out the entire time.”

I played with the hem of my sleeve to avoid looking at him. I couldn’t exactly mention why I’d looked so worried—because I thought Robyn would figure out what I’d done.

“Yes, well, isn’t that kind of what romance is like?” I asked. “I mean, it’s a rush, and it’s scary, but somehow it’s all worth it?” Or so I’d been told.

Both Robyn and Logan laughed.

“It’s not supposed to be scary. It’s supposed to be . . . whatever the opposite of scary is,” Robyn said. “Romance is supposed to be like finding someone who knows things about you without you ever having to tell them. It should be like the one safe thing in this scary world. That’s when you know it’s right.”

“Right,” Logan said.

I looked between them. “You act like it’s so easy.” I expected this type of conversation from Robyn. She often waxed poetic about “the spark” and perfect couples. But Logan? The guy who couldn’t even be bothered to brush his hair? What gave him the confidence to talk about love like he knew what to expect? I turned to face him.

“As if you even had a romantic bone in your body,” I said.

“I can be romantic.” He didn’t pull back or look away.

His expression let me know he was totally invested in our conversation. It wasn’t the distracted look of a guy who found something on his phone more interesting, or of someone who was thinking of something else entirely, like I’d seen too many times with my friends’ boyfriends. I wasn’t used to this kind of attention from a guy, and I kind of hated myself for enjoying it. I was all too aware of the way he was looking at me and what it was doing to my insides. And how I *wasn’t* supposed to feel that way about Logan.

“Mm-hmm,” I said. “I’d like to see that.”

What had possessed me to say that?

Robyn half choked on her gum.

“All right, you’ve forced my hand,” Logan said. “Remember that favor you owe me? I’m calling it in now.”

I tilted my head and thumped Robyn on the back a few times until she swatted my arm away. “You want me to . . . what? Say you’ve won the argument?” I asked.

Logan shook his head. “Nope, I want you to come with me.”

“What? Now? The game just started.”

He tapped my notebook.

“And judging from the way you haven’t even opened your binder, you already have your article written. Am I right?”

I opened my mouth but nothing came out.

“Robyn, you can text Mia the final score, right?” he asked.

“Hmmm-mmm,” Robyn said, her attention once more focused on her phone. She was looking through her email. My pulse skyrocketed. Robyn was *checking her email*. The same email I’d tampered with. That email. And looking at the sheer volume of emails there, she wasn’t scrolling through her inbox, but her archived messages.

I had to get out of here.

“Great,” Logan said. “My laptop is in my car, and you can submit your article that way. We can tether the data from my phone or something. I’ll take a couple of photos now, and then a few more from the field when we’ve gotten down there.”

He pulled out his camera to take a few more shots, and I was left scrambling for something to say. Should I go with him? It would put some distance between me and Robyn's email. That was a plus. But it would also put me in closer proximity to Logan, and that was definitely not a plus.

"But Vince just asked me out. I can't go do something . . . romantic . . . with you." Maybe I could find Elena, wherever she had disappeared to. I could hide out with her until Robyn's anger had blown over.

"He asked you to homecoming, Mia. That doesn't mean you're *dating*," Logan said. "I can't have you think some jock is the perfect example of romantic-ness."

"That's not a word," I said.

"You see, if you want to woo someone, you have to know the best way to go about it."

"Woo someone? What is this, the 1500s?" I asked. I almost looked to Robyn for affirmation but remembered she was checking her email, and I definitely didn't want to make eye contact with her right now.

"You have to know if someone likes public displays or if they'd rather do something more private."

I gulped. This conversation had gotten away from me.

"We're not going to be alone, are we?" Where was Elena? If I could find her in the crowd, I could make up an excuse to leave this conversation.

"It's a surprise," he said. "Do you trust me?"

He gazed into my eyes, and I couldn't remember what I was arguing about.

I looked to Robyn for backup, but she was still scrolling through her email, a scowl overtaking her face.

“Mia, this email—”

“Gotta go!” I said, pushing Logan out of the row.

He smiled and slung his camera over one arm.

“Great. Bye, Robyn.”

I was out of options. Apparently, I was going to be wooed whether I liked it or not.