

“You must be Olivia.”

His shoes came into focus first: squishy loafers with soft raised edges and thick, sensible soles. They reminded Olivia of mushrooms, not only because they were the color of mushrooms—the beige, rubbery, pre-chopped kind usually sold in plastic-wrapped containers—but also because they could easily have been made from some species of fungus.

“It *is* Olivia.” Mushroom Foot shifted his weight uncertainly from one toadstool to the other. “Isn’t it?”

Olivia Larsen uncrossed her arms and sat up. Had she been sleeping? She remembered finding a hidden spot on the grass by Golden Gate Prep’s double-wide doors just as the bell was ringing for lunch. She remembered staring numbly at the sidewalk, getting an ankle’s-eye view of her new classmates as they filed in and out. But she could tell by the way the boy was looking at her, sideways from behind a mop of dark, springy hair, an embarrassed little half smile twitching into place, that he’d been standing there for a while.

“Sorry,” she said, swatting the seat of her khakis for patches of dirt. That was all she needed: to be paraded around on her first day of school with wet brown splotches all over her butt. “I mean, yeah. I’m Olivia.”

As soon as she stood up Olivia felt dizzy, like the insides of her brain were spinning. She squinted, burrowing her fingertips into the sides of her temples, the dull headache that had been with her for months firing up behind blue eyes.

“I’m Miles. I’m supposed to give you a tour. Our moms work together, right?” He thrust one hand forward for her to shake and then quickly pulled it back, as if he’d accidentally touched something hot. “Are you okay?”

Olivia tried to nod, but a full-body yawn stretched her mouth wide open, her eyes reflexively squeezing shut. She hadn’t had a solid night’s sleep since her family had arrived in San Francisco a few days before. Strange, new city sounds were keeping her awake, and that morning she’d stared restlessly at the digital numbers on her alarm clock, praying it would forget to go off.

“You must be exhausted,” Miles warmly allowed, directing a handful of hair away from his forehead.

Olivia swung her saggy backpack over one shoulder. She almost hadn’t brought it—what was the point of a book bag when you didn’t yet have any books? But it was the same bag she’d carried to school every day since the beginning of seventh grade, a navy blue JanSport with faded nylon straps, and it reminded her of home.

“We can do this another time, if you want,” Miles said, shoving his hands into the pockets of his thin-wale, dark green corduroy pants. They were belted below the waist by a fraying

piece of rope, tied into a knot and bulging out from under the hem of his muted orange and blue button-down shirt.

“No,” Olivia said quickly, feeling bad. It wasn’t his fault their moms worked at the same law firm downtown and had arranged for him to show her around at lunch, like some kind of high school playdate. “I’ll be fine.”

Miles untucked his hands from his pockets, clapping them together and then cringing, like he was surprised by the sound they’d made. “Okay, so,” he said, clearing his throat, “are you ready for the grand tour?”

Olivia tried her best to smile as Miles flattened his long fingers against the lobby door and pushed it open.

The lobby was oddly shaped, with an angular roof that jutted out over the entryway and a futuristic front desk built in against one pristine white wall. The receptionist was a youngish woman with choppy hair the color of a pink highlighter and silver studs in both eyebrows, with a cordless phone wedged between her shoulder and ear.

Miles gestured to her with an open palm. “Olivia, Bess. Bess, Olivia.” The receptionist looked up quickly and flashed her a smile as Miles turned on his squishy heels. “Shall we move on?”

Olivia followed Miles around the corner and through a narrow, dark hallway that snaked around the perimeter of the whole school. Golden Gate Prep was a confusing combination of modern and medieval design, with an unassuming slate and glass exterior disguising the labyrinth of hollow corridors and stone archways within. It felt like the building had been renovated from the outside in, and then forgotten.

“It’s not so bad once you get used to it,” Miles offered, as

if reading her mind. Olivia smiled and did her best to keep up, hiding another yawn with the sleeve of her peach-colored cashmere cardigan. It was almost as if basic human functions were beyond her control these days. She was lucky if she managed to string a few intelligible words together in between.

“Sorry if I suck at this,” Miles muttered, pushing ahead and dragging one hand along a thick wood panel that split the wall waist-high. “There are people who actually do this here. You know, like, give tours and things,” he said apologetically. “But not on a random Thursday after spring break, I guess. . . .”

Olivia nodded, her legs stiff and her muted black boots heavy as cinder blocks as she struggled to keep up.

“Speaking of which,” Miles said, pausing at a crossroads where one hallway abruptly bisected another, “what are you doing here, anyway?”

Olivia felt familiar crimson splotches blooming on her face and neck. She had long since accepted the unique dermatological curse of wearing her emotion for all to see, and arranged her mass of strawberry blond curls so that they fell over one shoulder, hoping to hide her blushing profile.

“Er, sorry,” Miles stammered. “That sounded way less harsh in my head. It’s just, we don’t usually get anybody new this late in the term, and all my mom told me is that you moved. She didn’t say where from.”

“Boston,” Olivia offered, digging her fists deeper into the fuzzy pockets of her sweater. This was always her answer, even though it was a lie. Nobody had ever heard of little suburban Willis, which, despite being only twelve miles from the Boston city line, might as well have been in another state for all of the time Olivia had spent there.

“Wow,” Miles said, his dark, bushy eyebrows arching skyward. “You didn’t drive all the way out, did you?”

“No,” Olivia said a little too loudly, recoiling at the idea of a cross-country road trip with her parents. They weren’t exactly the word-game-and-trail-mix type of family—at least not anymore. “We flew in over the weekend so my mom could start at work,” she explained. “I guess the firm made her an offer she couldn’t refuse.”

“Right,” Miles said, with a careful nod that said he knew there was more to the story. “That would’ve been a killer commute.”

Olivia managed a smile as he pushed through another set of sturdy glass doors and led them outside.

“Welcome to lunch,” he announced, letting his recycled-rubber messenger bag fall from his shoulder.

The courtyard was a big open circle, with dappled sunlight playing on the crooked cobblestone. Scattered around clusters of low tables and benches, students were chatting and laughing.

“Where’s the cafeteria?” Olivia asked, squinting back through a wall of arched windows.

“There’s the Depot, I guess.” Miles shrugged, taking an orange from his bag and digging in to peel it with his fingers. “Little café next to the lobby. They have pretty decent coffee, fresh fruit, vegan pastries, whatever. Most kids bring from home. If I have a long enough break, I usually go out.”

“Go out?” Back at Willis, the only time they’d been allowed to leave was for field trips or with the occasional forged note.

“The Haight’s right around the corner,” Miles explained, nodding vaguely behind them. “It’s kind of a scene, but there

are a couple good coffee shops and burrito places. Of course, you have to look past about a thousand head shops to find them. . . .”

Olivia’s eyes wandered from one group of students to another. Lunch at home had been like a road map of the social circles at Willis. The long orange table by the windows was always reserved for Olivia and her group of friends. The theater freaks sat on the floor by the hall. The computer kids played with their newest gadgets by the salad station. The jocks threw greasy handfuls of Cajun fries at each other over by the vending machines. It was the same day after day, year after year, and it was all Olivia knew.

Here there were no designated areas, and to Olivia’s untrained eye, it seemed like there weren’t really any discernible groups. Everyone was completely unique and somehow also exactly the same. It looked like lunch at the United Nations, if the United Nations’ dress code was skinny jeans, vintage dresses, American Apparel sweatshirts, and scrawl-font tees.

“Aren’t you hungry?” Miles asked.

Olivia opened her mouth to answer but was silenced by the whirl of a skateboard rolling past. She looked up to see the rider: a tallish boy with shaggy, burnt blond hair, and clear green eyes that sparkled in a way that made it difficult for Olivia to look anywhere else.

He smiled when their eyes met, a slow, friendly smile, like he was recognizing her from somewhere else. Olivia felt her cheeks flush as he pushed at the ground with one broad stroke of his navy shell-toed sneaker. He glided down a stone path and behind one of the building’s jutting corner wings, and was gone.

“No, thanks,” Olivia mumbled dreamily, before snapping to attention. “I mean, not really. I already ate.” It was half-true. She hadn’t eaten, but she wasn’t hungry, and hadn’t been for months. Her mother had even started to comment on her collarbones, but Olivia didn’t care. She wasn’t trying to lose weight—she just wasn’t that interested in food anymore.

“So did you find them yet?” Miles asked, pulling a bag of organic pita crisps from his insulated lunch cooler. He popped the bag open and held it out to Olivia.

“Find who?” Olivia asked, politely shaking her head.

“The VIPs,” Miles said between crackling bites. “The in crowd. The see-and-be-seens.”

Olivia scanned the courtyard again.

“They work hard to blend,” he went on. “And they’d never admit to being who they are. But if you look hard enough, you’ll find them.”

Olivia’s gaze landed on a small table nestled against a far wall, partially shaded by the low-hanging branches of a pale pink magnolia. A crew of bohemian-chic hipsters were passing around plastic trays of sushi rolls, fingering chopsticks, and laughing. Lounging on a wooden bench was a thin, ginger-haired guy in a black and tan checkered shirt, his long legs spread out before him. Folded on his lap sat a baby-faced Asian girl, twirling locks of the boy’s red curls between purple-polished fingertips.

On the mosaic tabletop another slender girl with dramatic eye makeup and silky dark hair sat in lotus position, carefully sorting through a bag of granola and tossing ingredients up in the air, catching them in her open mouth. She was a study in layers: striped kneesocks over ribbed, solid tights, all tucked

snugly into worn, thick-heeled motorcycle boots. A long wool sweater was drawn at the waist over a high-collared dress, and a thin knit scarf wrapped endlessly around her neck and shoulders.

“Ding ding ding!” Miles sang out, jolting Olivia out of her trance.

“Calla Karalekas,” he muttered, feigning disinterest. “The planet around which lesser moons revolve. Her father’s some kind of ambassador to Greece, and her mother is Japanese royalty.”

“She’s pretty,” Olivia muttered, needlessly. She wasn’t pretty. She was possibly the most stunningly gorgeous human being Olivia had ever seen.

“She’s all right, I guess.” Miles shrugged. “If you’re into that kind of thing.”

Olivia watched as Miles fidgeted with a faux-leather cuff, rolling it back and forth against the narrow knobs of his wrist. “Which, clearly, you’re not,” she said.

“Hey,” he insisted, straightening his elbows into an exaggerated stretch, “I’ve gone to school with this crowd since the sixth grade. I’ve had some time to observe.”

“Seems like you do a lot of observing,” Olivia pointed out, tucking one thumb into the hole where the sleeve of her sweater had worn thin, and hugging her elbows to keep warm. The late March sun was strong and steady, but every so often a thick breeze would send little quaking shivers up from the base of her spine.

“I learn a lot that way,” Miles said, unscrewing the top of his ceramic water bottle and taking a sip. “I’ve learned a lot about you.”

For a moment Olivia leveled her eyes with his, so big and dark that they appeared opaque. “Like what?” she asked.

“Like you’re hiding something,” he said quickly, settling back against the wall and resting his solid arms against bent knees. “Nobody skips town in the middle of the school year for no reason,” he continued, narrowing his eyes into little slits.

Olivia shrugged, crossing and uncrossing her ankles and staring at a patch of weeds pushing up between the crooked stone tiles.

“So what was it?” he demanded. “Messy divorce?”

Olivia shook her head and swallowed.

“Trouble with the law?” His voice was light and easy. A glimmer of a smile was twitching its way across his lips.

She swallowed again. This was the part she hated the most. The fact that no matter what she said, no matter how she said it, that smile would vanish in an instant. She would feel awkward. He would feel like an ass. And they’d finish what was left of their lunch in an uncomfortable silence.

“Come on,” he pleaded, as if defying her thoughts. “There has to be some reason you moved all this way. I mean, my mom’s firm is good, but it’s not *that* good. . . .” Miles wagged his eyebrows, urging her on.

Olivia steadied her shaking hands against the table. “My twin sister died.”

Her voice was tiny and unfamiliar. No matter how many times she said those words, she couldn’t escape the feeling that it was a line she was repeating from somebody else’s life. Maybe the main character in some sappy movie that she and Violet had seen on TV, cracking jokes about the lame acting

but secretly feeling unspeakably lucky that nothing so terrible would ever happen to them.

“My mom grew up here,” Olivia went on, trying anything to ease the tension of the moment. “Thought it would be good to try something new. Or old, I guess. . . .”

Miles cleared his throat and fidgeted with the empty plastic bag of chips.

Olivia didn't need to look up to know that she'd been right: His easy smile had vanished in an instant. He felt like an ass. And they finished what was left of lunch in an uncomfortable silence.