

1 *Ven Hoar High*

10 days until Summer break.

“*G*ah, I can’t hold my eyes open any longer!” Jai groans, vigorously rubbing at his eyes. He wipes away the tears that are streaming down his face. He has held my gaze long enough to pass the time in the back corner of Mr. Stuarts’ Math class.

Mr. Stuart always runs late and for some horrid reason, Jai and I are always early. I’m not complaining, a staring contest trumps the usual childish game of rock, paper, scissors we resort to out of boredom.

Jai is my best friend, but he is also my first crush. He’s the reason I wake up in the morning and also the reason why I remember to take a shower two hours before every school day. I guess you could say, he is my rock. I call him whenever I need a shoulder to cry on. There are many times that I just want to hear the rasp of his voice.

No, I am *not* a stalker. It’s not like he won’t find out someday or that he doesn’t already suspect I have some kind of feelings for him. I just don’t want to ruin the friendship we’ve had since the ninth grade.

I have always dreamed of our graduation day. Instead of the usual gift of scribbled lyrics on a piece of paper, he will give me one of those little black boxes that say, “*I’m yours forever.*”

Unfortunately, that is still a whole year away.

Until that time arrives, we sit in Mr. Stuarts’ drab, monotonous math class and retain absolutely nothing of importance in our hormonal, wretched minds.

Mr. Stuart rushes into the classroom looking like he has just hijacked the wardrobe department off the set of Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood. His ensemble today, includes an oversized, button up green cardigan, over a sky blue long-sleeved shirt that he’s tucked into his loose dark blue slacks. The top seam of his pants puckers, because he always tightens his leather belt a notch farther than he should. A clear sign of a man who has no control in his life.

He frantically sets his pile of books on his desk. He looks truly frazzled today. Three of the books from his stack fall to the floor. He mutters an expletive under his breath, then leans down to pick them up. Our classmates, that are pouring into the classroom begin laughing at him. I shoot a warning glare at Jai when I hear his laughter. He covers his mouth with his hand, but continues to chuckle.

Mr. Stuart’s face has turned bright red under his strawberry blonde hair. Sadly, a red-head curse that I can relate to.

“Settle down! Settle down everyone!” He stutters from embarrassment.

He finishes picking up the books, he stacks them in the shape of a pyramid on his desk before stepping over to the chalkboard. He picks up a broken piece of chalk, puts his hand up to the chalkboard to write and slides the chalk he’s holding across the chalkboard. This causes a dreadful, deafening screech, that finally gets students attention. Everyone in the class cringes and holds their hands over their ears.

“I said, it’s *time* to settle down.” His voice is deep and threatening now. The unsure man that had entered the room moments ago, disappearing before our eyes.

Mr. Stuart looks over his shoulder at all of us. It’s like the beginning of one of those

scary, but truthful horror flicks you hear about. The one where the underpaid, under appreciated math teacher is pushed to his very limit and decides to lock the door and end all of his “*problems.*”

Jai leans over towards me. He holds his hand up over his face, like the teacher won't notice him speaking to me.

“Someone shit in his Cheerios this morning.” Jai loudly whispers before resting back in his chair.

Mr. Stuart's eyes come to rest on Jai and I. He twirls the piece of chalk he has been writing with in between his fingers. The look in his eyes clearly states how much he loathes our existence.

I gulp, terrified to push the man too far. There have been rumors going around VenHoar High that Mr. Stuart's wife is filing for a divorce. Each passing day he seems like he is becoming more and more of a slave to his depression and anger.

Jai's eyes grow wide as he stares back at the teacher, it's like a scarier version of our staring contest. Mr. Stuart stalks closer with a menacing expression. He comes to a halt in front of Jai's desk and then placing his palms on Jai's desk, he leans toward him. He makes a growling sound at Jai under his breath.

“Do you have *something* to say, Mr. Young?” He asks pointedly.

I sit, facing forward, peripherally watching Jai's reaction. His dark brows knit together in concern. I know he is thinking up some inappropriate response to say to the man. I silently, but futilely, pray that he will not be a smart ass, just this once. He makes a funny noise in the back of his throat, then looks up at the ceiling, as if he needs to contemplate his response. Then, he looks Mr. Stuart right in the eye.

Jai puckers his face, looking as if the smart alec response that wants to burst from his mouth, is painfully choking him. Mr. Stuart's grip on Jai's desk tightens.

Wisely, he shakes his head slowly back and forth. The teacher's eyes never leave Jai's.

“*Very* well.” Mr. Stuart says through gritted teeth.

He walks back to the front of the classroom. Angrily, he throws the piece of broken chalk into the metal tray. After expelling a deep sigh, he faces the class and calmly begins to discuss the lesson for today.

Every time Mr. Stuart turns to write something on the chalkboard, Jai taps out a song with his pencil on the side of his desk. I send him *looks* each time he does it, hoping to stop his foolish actions. He just glances at me and winks. He has the type of face that no matter how much you may be tempted to slap it, there is a whole other part of you that can't help but smile when he smiles. *Even if he is being evil.*

Much to my relief, the class drags on uneventfully. One more day of math and nobody had to die. The bell finally rings, signaling the end of class. I quickly slam my book shut and rush to get up.

My stomach growls so loudly that I am sure the mob of teens I am surrounded by will hear it. I am starving, I haven't eaten since yesterday.

In my opinion, breakfast is for narcissistic people. The ones who have to control everything, keeping to their perfect little schedules. I bet Mr. Stuart eats breakfast.

I gave up eating cereal in the morning when I found out Trix were no longer flowers and watermelon slices, but balls..just balls.

After three more agonizing hours of droning teachers and life lessons, I throw my books into my locker. I'm finally ready to go to the cafeteria and feed the beast that has been growling in my belly for the last four hours.

Jai is waiting for me at his locker, like he does every day. When I walk toward him,

he gives me a wicked grin. I knew he would have some story to tell me about a prank he pulled.

“Look at Munchkin. Look, Look..” He starts pointing his finger at another student who is being shoved into his locker by members of the football team.

“That’s not cool.” I frown.

“Oh, C’mon!” He throws his arms out, “It’s a little funny..”

I shake my head and turn away, heading toward the lunchroom. That’s when *she* comes walking over. *Courtney VenHoar*. She looks me up and down like I am scum on the bottom of her shoes.

I am wearing my pastel pink 3/4 sleeve v-neck sweater with a lacy white tank underneath, along with a pair of black skinny jeans. My red hair is curled and tied into a side pony that hangs down to my right shoulder. I am *completely* confident with how I look.

That is, until I look at her, in her knee-length, black skirt and flaming red *too-tight-on-her-boobs* shirt. Those boots she’s wearing should only be worn on Saturday night, at a strip club. I now realize that I look like a freaking ten year old. I’m surprised Barbie hasn’t called me to give her favorite shirt back. The buttons aren’t straining on my top, because, lets face it, the booby-fairy skipped my house.

My hair, that I thought looked cute and spunky when I did it this morning, now makes me feel like Pippi Long-stocking.

She peers down her pert little nose at me, then flicks her long blonde hair to the side. It’s not the fact that she has wavy mermaid hair and her body has that perfect hour glass shape, or that she looks like someone out of a commercial for Victoria Secret that disgusts me.

Nope.

It’s the way *she* looks at *him*., and *he* looks at *her*.

It is like I have become nonexistent while standing on the outside of their flirt bubble. When they come face to face with each other, I feel like I am standing behind a glass mirror watching my worst nightmare unfold before my eyes.

His lips slowly curve into a lopsided smirk when she approaches him. I don’t know what she is even coming over to talk to him about, seems how he hangs out with low lives like myself and Maxine Sanderson.

She is utterly and disgustingly close to him while she speaks. I can barely hear what they are saying and I am standing RIGHT HERE. It’s like a silent teenage mating ritual. I realize I probably resemble a chihuahua with rabies that looks like it wants to bite her leg off, but the resemblance isn’t far off.

“That’d be great!” Jai exclaims loudly, “We’d love to play for you.” He replies to her whispers, his eyes glittering with fascination.

I instantly know what it is about now. Courtney VenHoar, or as I like to call her ‘*Courtney Ven-Whore*’, is looking for a band that will play for the school benefit. Jai, of course, is in a rock band. They call themselves “*The Young & Reckless*.”

I have watched them shred and growl every Saturday night since we first met. They finally graduated from basement to garage band.

“Great!” She leans in to him, “We’ll talk more about it later.” She whispers.

Courtney whips around so fast that her long hair swats me right in the face like a whip. I am almost certain it could be scientifically proven that I will now die from swallowing too much bleach.

Jai stares after her, in a daze, “Wow..” He mumbles dreamily.

“Earth to Jai.” I mutter.

He is still staring after her swaying “skirt”.

“Blondes kill your brain,” I tease. *I always resort to humor, laughing is better than tears.*

Jai rolls his eyes, “whatever,” he mutters.

I walk with him in silence to the cafeteria, unsure of what to say. All I know, is that it feels like the fiery pit of Hell has settled inside of my stomach after seeing the two of them.

Maxine comes rushing over to us, a look of panic on her face. She’s nervously adjusting her thin-framed glasses on her face.

“Mayday! Mayday! Nobody told me we had to write an essay in English!” She squeals, gesturing wildly with her arms.

She stands there, all five-foot- two of her, wearing layer upon layer of clothing. She must not have been able to decide which outfit to wear this morning, so, she wore them all. It makes her look like a little hobo.

“It’s like its English, Maxine.. Everyday there is an essay.” Jai smirks at her, grabbing a chocolate milk out of the cafeteria cooler.

I don’t understand how he can drink milk before football practice, it seems like it would lead to vomit.

“You just shut your pretty pie hole, mister.” She points her finger violently at him.

Jai stands about eight inches taller than her. He seems to tower over her with his muscular frame. It is a funny sight to see, like Peter Pan and Tinker Bell. He teases her and leans down, curving his back more than he actually has to.

“What ya going to do, Maxi? Climb me, then kill me?” His grin grows increasingly larger. He exaggerates running away from her to go get his food, laughing while he does so.

“See you sexy beasts in English!” He yells over his shoulder at us, slowing to a walk.

I can feel my face turning bright red when the cafeteria full of students turn to look at Maxine and I standing there. Two very *un-sexy* and not even threatening enough to be beasts, *girls*.

Maxine fixes her glasses by pushing them up on her nose. She always does that when she’s nervous or annoyed. Her eyes are full of hate for Jai Young..

“He is such a dick.” she mutters under her breath.

