

## Paint me beautiful

### Part 1

It was the first day of winter. The air was beginning to freeze and the icy atmosphere struck my skin so cold I could barely breathe. I hated riding the bus in the morning. Waiting at the corner always turned my lips blue, I couldn't wait until the day I could drive. 43 days and counting. I got on one stop after Torrence, a dark haired, blue eyed wonder that never ceased to be beautiful. Everyday she would sit in seat 16 on the side of the bus where the driver's seat is. I sat in front of her. Seat 15 was mine. The morning routine. Every morning I got on the bus, non-existent to anyone there. My light brown Birkenstock clogs clopped down with a medium sound of life. My hair was pulled back in a ponytail and my bag hung lightly over my shoulders. That day of Winter though, with the clouds hanging gloomingly in the sky, was the day that changed everything.

I wrapped my arms around my shivering body and puffed donuts into the cold air. The white breath ricocheted off my blue lips and skipped into the air to frolic with the frost. The big Yellow school bus slowly maneuvered around the corner and I took a step forward. My foot, most regrettably, had landed in a small city of ants, busy at work to prepare for winter's snow. The bus door opened and, after shaking off my foot, I made my way up the three steps to find my seat. But someone was sitting in it. panic rushed through me as I scanned the bus for an open seat. None. *You've got to sit down, people are beginning to notice you.* My eyes suddenly drew the attention of the dark haired girl in seat 16. "You can sit with me if you'd like." The words rolled out so perfectly, as she moved her tan over-the-shoulder bag into her lap to make room. Hesitantly, I sat down. "Thanks." I said. We sat quietly until the bus came to a stop at a red light. Torrence turned toward me. "I don't think I've seen you around much, how long have you been coming here?" I could smell the mint from her orbit gum.

"I've been here all year, I just kind of keep to myself."

"Oh." She replied. "Well, I'm Torrence, or Tory," she said without taking a breath. She stuck her hand out.

"Hi." I slid my hand into hers for a shake. "I'm Inessa."

"Wow that's a pretty name. You'd think I'd have heard it before."

"Thank you." I smiled.

She turned back and looked out the window. Her soft blue eyes reflecting the sunlight that shone on the frosted windows. Her hands lay lifeless, nails light pink, on the Abercrombie style jeans she was wearing. On her left hand she wore a gold ring with two hearts and a pink gold rose in-between. I assumed it was a promise ring. Slowly she brought her arm up to her shoulder and rested her hand on top of her shirt. "It's a little chilly, isn't it?" She asked with a smile. She leaned over to pick up her soft brown jacket from her backpack. Tory grinned as she wrapped her delicate figure in the warmth of the jacket. I smiled back.

The bus arrived at our school just in time to chase my thoughts away. The school was new. Fancy interior and neatly designed so that it appeared to be put together well. But in truth, people were just as messy, unorganized and lost in trying to find themselves as they were at any other high school. That, or they were lost trying to find their class in our maze of education.

The doors opened and I stood up. Glancing at Tory, who was still sitting rummaging in her bag for her ringing cell phone, I walked away. Down the steps and into the doors where my existence disappeared

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I walked into the school, clogs clopping with each new step I took and looked around. Many of the people looked the same. Personalities blending with each other's and looking like nothing more than a sea of familiar faces. All the blonds, then all of the brunettes. It was like the movies. A place of cliques and torment. With one exception. A roamer. A boy that stood out to so many people in so many ways that he couldn't be classified if you tried. Californian brown skin and dark tasseled curly hair. A somewhat vintage-prep style and lips that looked so soft. Aiden Hinton was every girl's dream. Unfortunately, the only place I ever spoke to Aiden was IN my dreams. Then I saw him.

In the back of my first period room, creative writing with Mrs. Crandall, he stood with his friend Jake Kelly. I took my seat in the back left corner and opened my binder to my writing. The clock struck 7:30 and the sound of the bells that reminded me of my grandmother's wind chimes,

informed us that class was to be starting. Aiden walked by my desk and I caught the familiar scent of his Adidas cologne. As he brushed by the squeezed area to get to the front, his leg knocked my notebook off my desk and papers were scattered everywhere. Almost immediately, he fell to his knees while blurting out apologies. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to do that. Now all of your papers are everywhere. Here let me get that," he said, grabbing for my pencil and setting it on my desk. "I'm sorry." I set my hand on the paper he was headed for and stopped him. He looked at me. His turquoise watery blue green eyes pierced me with a kind of amazement I'd never felt before. Staring at me, like I am the only person, the only girl, he wants to look at for the rest of his life. Waiting for me to say something. Waiting for me to break the silence. *Come on Ness. This is your moment. Make him fall. This is IT.* But even with him right there, one the creative writing floor and even with his hand so close I could feel vibrations from it, and even though he was so close to me that I could see a tiny freckle smack dab in the middle of his tan nose, all that I could say was, "You don't need to apologize."

"N-no, I'm really sorry." He stuttered out of confusion.

"Really," I added, setting my papers on my desk, "it's ok. But thanks."

Aiden picked up on last piece of paper and set it on the notebook, making my heart beat faster as he peered into my eyes. It was almost as if he was searching for something- anything. And then, with a final blink of lost personality, he turned away and walked to the front of the room. He left me in the dark and walked into the spotlight where he belonged. But I think my smile was gleaming.

## Part 2

"Inessa!" I turned to the loudness of my name, shocked someone was calling for me. I found myself face to face with Tory who was grinning. "Hi Tory."

"What class do you have next?" She asked me, as we started walking down the semi-crowded halls.

"Oh, um..I have art next. With Jacobs."

"That's right next to me! Can we walk together?" Looking at the ground I smiled.

"We already are."

"So how's your morning been?" Tory asked me as she offered me some gum. Politely refusing, I replied, maybe a bit too dreamily, "Good...Aiden talked to me." Tory nudged me in the ribs.

"Does someone have a crush?!" I smiled innocently linking my fingers.

"Well maybe a little, but shhh" I said to her.

"Don't worry I won't say a thing." Zipping her lips and throwing the imaginary key in the trash can behind her, she said, "He is a great guy though. Defiantly quality."

"Are you friends with him?" I asked curiously.

"Yea, we have known each other forever. Our families have grown up together." She must have sensed my concern. "Don't worry." She giggled. "There are no romantic feelings between us. In fact, I don't believe he likes anyone."

"Really?" That surprises me." I said.

"Yea, the blonde, fake, plastered-with-makeup girls really don't do it for him I guess. That's the majority of the girls here at Crestview high. Who knows? Maybe today was your beginning."

"Yea, right." I laughed. "Don't get my hopes up for the impossible."

"Hey, don't be pessimistic. Anything is possible." She winked at me as we went to different doors. She went to History and I to art. I, to the paint the world, and her, to learn of the painters of the world; two universes colliding to form one. Something new, maybe she was right, anything could happen.

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Grabbing her arm, Tory found herself being bombarded by Aiden with questions.

"Do you know her? Are you friends with her? Who IS she?"

"Whoa skippy, take a breath. What are you talking about?" She asked as she sat down in her desk and pulled out her pink spiral notebook.

"That girl." He replied more slowly.

"Which?" She asked, a tad annoyed.

"I-I don't know. Um...light hair, dark brown eyes, sort of quiet. You were just with her."

"Oh, Inessa?"

"That's a pretty name." He replied, intrigued.

"Yea," she said, "Isn't it gorgeous?"

"Who is she?" I had never seen her before and then this morning I accidentally ran into her and knocked all of her papers over."

"Nice move Slick."

"Heh, thanks. But seriously she was so nice about it and when we looked at each other, I dunno, something clicked. It took all of my control not to turn around and stare at her through the whole class."

"Well I won't be much help either. I just met her today."

"Tory." He said, shaking her shoulders, "You've got to HELP me!!"

"Aid, you are barely ever interested in anyone, why her?" Tory replied, laughing at his enthusiasm.

"She's different Tory. I can tell. She's real." Eyeing him. Tory smiled.

"I'll help you get to know her, but you have to meet her by yourself."

"Ok deal." He replied, "Thanks Tory."

"Awww anything for my bestest friend Aidey Wadey." She said in baby talk voice, pinching his cheek.

Glaring at her, he walked across the room and sat down. As soon as he knew she wasn't watching, he smiled. This could be the girl of his dreams. This could be real. This could be what he'd been waiting for all a long.

Aiden opened his history book and turned to page 327. But as much as he wanted to learn about how Lincoln set the slaves free, being chained and ordered, was the furthest things from his mind.

His head was in the clouds and he had no desire to come back down to earth.

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Suddenly the bell rang and Aiden jumped at the sound of ringing. He glanced up to see Torrence exiting and meeting up with Inessa. Quickly, he grabbed his bag and pushed himself to the door.

"Tory!" He yelled. Tory glanced at me and smiled. When I turned around, my jaw must have dropped 5 inches.

"Yes, Aiden?" She asked, as if this was a routine business.

"Where are you going?"

"My next class hunny." She replied sarcastically. *Don't notice me. Don't say hello. Don't notice me. Please please don't say hello.*

"Hello." I opened my eyes to see Aiden looking at me intently.

"Hi." I replied. *Man, way to sound unique.*

"I don't believe we have officially met. I'm Aiden," he said, sticking his hand out to shake mine.

"Hello, I'm Inessa." I replied, gracefully sliding my paint covered hand into his. He tightened his tan fingers around mine and said, "I'm really sorry-so horribly sorry- for running into you this morning." I smiled.

"Well, I'm sorry, too."

"For what?" He asked, confused.

I looked at his hand and let go. His tan soft hands were now covered in a rainbow of colors from my painted ones. "I just got out of art." I stated shrugging with a laugh. Smiling he replied,

"Looks like you'll be with me all day."

I bushed. He grinned. She groaned.

"Alright guys. Back to school. Exiting dreamland." Tory said.

I turned and looked at Tory who was trying desperately not to burst into uncontrollable laughter. She grabbed my sleeve and yelled, "See ya at lunch, Skippy." I turned and we waved at each other as I walked to my next class.

"What just happened?!" I asked Tory.

"What happened is that the guy that every girl at this school wants, but can't have, was just flirting with you like crazy."

"How many shades of red am I?" I asked giggly.

"Oh brother," she replied. "I'll see you later." And she walked away smiling.

I slowly walked to my class. I couldn't stop grinning because I had never felt more beautiful than I did right then. Covered in paint and blushing.