

The Kiss List (First Kiss Shorts #1)

Author: Elle Gonzales

Category: YA&Teen

Description: Maisie Perry has never been kissed. So not a big deal, right? After all, shes not the only sixteen-year-old girl who's in the

same category.

Only problem is, shes turning seventeen in a month—and, well, she doesnt want to be a seventeen-year-old girl whos never been kissed. Like how lame is that?

So in order to fix that little issue, she makes a list of McKinley High boys who can hopefully give her that foot-popping first kiss shes always wanted. Her top choice? Conrad Harris. Shes not into him. But hes cute and popular—and just recently broke up with his girlfriend.

Good enough, right?

Now if only Denton Chase, his annoying best friend, could stop meddling in her business

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I 've never been kissed by a boy.

Not even a peck on the cheek.

Pretty normal for a sixteen-year-old girl who's never been on a date. Or never had a boyfriend. So it shouldn't be a big deal, right?

I mean, it's not like I'm the only girl in the world who's a little behind in that department. I'm pretty sure I can name dozens of girls in McKinley High who are just as inexperienced as me. I'm not going to, but I can.

So yeah, it shouldn't be a big deal at all.

But it kind of is—for me.

It's not that I'm desperate or anything.

But here's the thing: I'm turning seventeen in a month and, well, I don't want to be a seventeen-year-old girl who's never been kissed. Like how lame is that?

I'm not looking for a boyfriend. Not even for a short term. Maybe just a cute date where I can finally have that foot-popping kiss from Princess Diaries that I've always wanted. Something that's totally possible to achieve.

It's not even that hard. Girls get it all the time.

So how hard can it be?

I just need to come up with a plan...

"Maise, are you there? Did you just hear what I said?" Iris's impatient tone cuts through my haze, dragging me from my thoughts.

I blink a few times to clear my head. "Yeah, totally."

"No, you didn't." She rolls her eyes. "You've been daydreaming again. Let me guess, you finished another book last night and fell in love with the hero."

She loves to tease me about my hobby of reading romance books like I daydream about male love interests every single time. Yeah, right. I only do that when the hero is a hundred percent swoon-worthy. And I don't come across that kind of hero that often.

What can I say? I'm not easily impressed.

I grab my soda can and take a sip through the straw. "Uh, no. That wasn't the case at all. I didn't even read a single page. But if you must know, I spent the night watching Princess Diaries ."

She snorts. "Oh, so you were daydreaming about Michael."

"Eww, no. Chris Pine will always be the superior love interest." I raise a finger when she opens her mouth. "And before you say that it was him I was daydreaming about, I wasn't. I was just thinking about something."

"Okay, then tell me," Iris demands, taking a bite out of her tuna sandwich.

I'm about to do just that, but then I notice something on her dark blond hair. Knowing she'd be annoyed if I didn't say anything, I point out, "You know there's a tiny chunk

of bread sticking out of your hair right now, right?"

Her eyes widen in alarm. "Where?"

Laughing, I flick it off her hair. "There. It's gone."

"Okay, whatever." She waves a hand. "Back to what you were saying."

I pop a potato chip into my mouth. Should I even tell her? Ugh. Why am I even asking myself? Iris Wayans is my best friend, and I tell her everything important that's going on in my life. And this one definitely counts as important.

"You know I've never been kissed, right?" I say in a hushed whisper, making sure no one else can hear me.

"Uh-huh." She nods slowly.

"So I was inspired by the signature foot-popping kiss scene in Princess Diaries . Now, I'm thinking that I want to experience that before I turn seventeen. And I've got like a month before that happens."

"Okay?"

"I mean, I should make sure that I get to experience that, right? Every girl deserves to experience that kind of first kiss."

She takes a sip of her soda. "What happens if you don't?"

"Duh! Then I'll be a seventeen-year-old girl who's never been kissed."

"And that's a big deal?" I can tell she's trying hard not to laugh.

Why isn't she taking this seriously?

I glare at her. "Yes, it is. That's like being an old maid in teenage years."

"No, it's not." She finally lets out the laugh she was holding. "Who told you that nonsense?"

I fiddle with my short braids, suddenly feeling silly. "No one."

"Seriously. Who told you?"

"Fine. I heard it from a couple of seniors in the girls' bathroom this morning. They were talking about inexperienced girls."

They were so serious about it too, saying it was important for girls our age to explore stuff and experience things. I never even thought that a teenage old maid had ever existed, but what did I really know?

I'm not sure I wholly agree with them, but they got me thinking with that comment.

"Well, clearly, they don't know what they're talking about because it's not true. There's no such thing as a teenage old maid. Besides, that term is sexist. We're not living in the fifties."

"I know. I know. It's just that I'm suddenly feeling pressured about it."

"I really don't know what's the big deal, Maise. So you've never been kissed, but who cares? It's not the end of the world."

"Easy for you to say—you had your first kiss when we were like thirteen."

"Fourteen," she corrects me. "And it was just okay. There was nothing special about it. My foot didn't even pop or whatever. So you're not really missing out on anything."

"Please." I roll my eyes. "We spent hours on the phone after Ken Adams kissed you. You were so over the moon you couldn't stop talking. So it was more than okay. I think the exact word you used was 'perfect."

"I was fourteen. I didn't know any better then."

"Yeah, right. You dated him for like three months."

"Like I said—"

"Nope. Not buying it," I interrupt, popping more chips into my mouth.

"Fine. Believe whatever you want."

I pout. "It's not just that. Look at Angela Cornwell—she makes out with a different guy like every month. How does she do that?"

"So you want to be like her?"

"Heck, no. That sounds exhausting. I just need one kiss. That's it."

Well, one foot-popping kiss.

I only get one first kiss. So I have to make sure that it's perfect.

Maybe I should make a list when I get home? Like a list of boys that I think are good kissers? I have no idea how I can get even one of them to kiss me, but there's no harm

in trying.

Whatever. I'll figure it out later.

Blowing out a breath, I turn my attention back to my best friend. "Anyway, what was it that you were telling me about?"

"Oh, that. Nothing important. I just heard that Conrad Harris finally dumped Shelby White. I was just wondering if you knew about that."

"I did not," I say absently, staring in the direction of the boy in question.

The breakup must be true. Because Shelby isn't sitting with Conrad and his friends, which she usually does during lunch. He doesn't seem broken up about it though—not even a little bit. He's even laughing with his friends.

Then again, Conrad Harris has always been more popular than Shelby. Girls are always lining up to be his girlfriend.

Honestly, I don't see the appeal.

I guess he's cute with his light blond hair and pale blue eyes, not to mention that dimple on his left cheek. And he's quite tall too.

But boys that look like him are a dime a dozen here. So why does he stand out?

"Must be the dimple," I mutter. Yeah, that must be it.

"What are you muttering about?" Iris demands.

"Nothing."

But I think I just found the first boy that'll go on my list.

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"C onrad Harris, really? You can't be serious," Iris scoffs, watching me open my locker and take out my books.

I just told her about my plan of kissing Conrad. Well, it's not the exact plan. I'm not sure if he's even going to be the one I get to kiss. But he's a strong contender. Not that he knows. Yet.

"Uh-huh." I nod. "He's on my kiss list."

Yeah, that's what I named it—the kiss list. I came up with the title last night at home after I listed down the boys' names. And it sounds perfect if I do say so myself.

She blinks. "The what now?"

"The kiss list. So last night, I wrote down a list of potential guys that I could kiss. And Conrad is the first name on the list," I say, my gaze fixed on my reflection in my locker door mirror.

I know I'm average-looking. With my shoulder-length chocolate brown hair. Brown round eyes that look a little big for my face. Small nose. And wide downturned lips that make me look like I'm always pouting.

But I have no complaints. Because when I put some effort into my appearance, I can confidently say that I look and feel pretty.

Like today, my hair is swept back in a high ponytail. My lashes are curled, I'm wearing a bit of mascara, and my lips are glossed. And I'm in a cute baby pink puff-

sleeved dress that ends several inches above my knees.

Yep. I definitely look pretty.

I'm even twinning with my bestie. Well, sort of. Her blond hair is in a ponytail too. But instead of a dress, she's in a pink crop top and black floral skirt.

"Will you stop checking yourself out and explain to me this whole 'kiss list' thing?" Iris demands, using air quotes on the words.

Closing my locker, I tuck my books into my chest and hook my arm through Iris's as we make our way to Math class. "I literally just explained it. Didn't you listen to what I just said?"

"Oh, I did. And I hope you were joking."

"Nope. Dead serious."

"Ugh," Iris groans. "Okay, fine. Show me the freaking list."

"Duh, that's why I told you. I have every intention of showing it to you."

"Where is it then?"

"Later. When we get to class."

She groans again. "I can't believe you made a kiss list. I thought you were just being dramatic when you brought it up yesterday. But you're actually serious about this whole thing, aren't you?" She shakes her head, still in disbelief.

"Well, you know me. Whenever I put my mind to something, there's no stopping me

from getting it."

Don't get me wrong. I'm not some spoiled brat who always gets whatever she wants. That's not me at all. I'm just really persistent—especially if the goal is completely doable.

What do old people always say? "Where there's a will, there's a way." Well, I totally believe in that saying.

"How many guys are in there?"

"Around thirty, I think. I didn't number them. I just wrote down their names."

Iris shoots me a wide-eyed look. "Thirty? You're kidding!"

"You can never be sure with just one guy. Conrad Harris is my first choice. But in case it doesn't work out with him, at least I still have other options."

"Twenty-nine other options, to be exact," she says sarcastically just as we reach our class.

I just shrug, not wanting to discuss it out loud where people can easily hear us. It's not that I'm ashamed of my kiss list. I just have no intention of publicizing it. Aside from not wanting to jinx the whole thing, I know exactly what will happen if everyone finds out. I'd be the laughingstock of my whole class. Then I might as well kiss goodbye the chance of getting my first kiss before my seventeenth birthday.

It's not fair, I know. If a boy made this list, it wouldn't be a big deal. At worst, he'd get a good ribbing from his friends. But if a girl made one, she'd be labeled the sword. And that's a guarantee.

So yeah, not going to risk it.

Once we're settled in our seats, I fish the piece of yellow paper that contains the list of names out of my bag, then fold the paper into a small square. I hand it over to Iris who sits on my right, motioning for her to keep quiet.

She rolls her eyes before taking it.

I only give her a minute to read the names because Mr. Kroll has just walked into the room. So I quickly snatch the paper back and insert it between the pages of my Math book.

She'll grill me about the names later. But for now, we have to listen to a boring lecture.

Oh, yeah. Did I mention I'm not a fan of Math?

Oh, my God. Where is it?!

I'm silently freaking out as I flip through the pages of my Math book. I swear I stashed the paper in there before the class started. But now I can't find it.

It's not on the floor—I've already checked. So where the heck is it?

I'm really, really freaking out.

"Hey, you coming?" Iris is standing next to my chair.

"You go ahead. I'll be out in a minute."

"Are you sure?"

I force a smile. "Yeah. I'll just see you later in the cafeteria."

We only have this and History class together today. And History is not until the last period. So the next time I see her, it'll be at lunch.

Iris narrows her eyes on me, as if sensing that something's wrong. But then she shrugs and heads out the door, along with the rest of the class, without saying another word.

Knowing I only have a few minutes to spare, I go straight back to searching. I need to find that list fast.

"Come on. Where are you?"

"Looking for this?" The yellow paper lands on my desk, no longer folded in a small square.

Noooooo.

I squeeze my eyes shut.

This is sooo not happening right now.

This is exactly what I was afraid of—someone getting their hands on my stupid list. I really thought I was alone. I was sure everybody had already left.

Well, clearly not.

"What are you doing?"

I crack an eye open to see the Los Angeles Lakers' logo staring back at me.

Wait. I know who's wearing that black Lakers shirt today.

My suspicion is confirmed when I glance all the way up and lock gazes with a smirking Denton Chase, his light brown eyes visibly filled with amusement as he stares down at me.

Oh, I am so screwed.

No. Be cool. You can still get out of this mess.

"Nothing. Just meditating," I say, giving him a—hopefully believable—cool smile.

"Uh-huh. You know, I've never seen a kiss list before. Mind explaining this to me?" He takes the paper back before I can beat him to it.

Ugh. I should've stashed it inside my bag the moment he tossed it on my desk.

And of course, he's not buying it. Why did I even put "kiss list" as a title? Such a dumb, amateurish move.

"It's just a stupid list, okay? It has no significance whatsoever." I try to take it from him, but he quickly puts his hand behind his back.

"Seriously?" I rise from my seat. "Give it to me, Denton."

"I will. After you tell me what this list is all about."

I chew on my bottom lip, considering my options.

I don't think I can take it from him by force. He's practically six feet tall, and I'm just around five-five. He's for sure faster than me too. He's on the swim team. Which means he's athletic. Which is something I'm not.

Yeah, I'd just end up making a fool of myself.

I really don't want to tell him. But it's starting to feel like I don't have a choice.

Just my luck that, of all people, it was Conrad's best friend who managed to get ahold of my stupid list. I know he sits right behind me. He must have seen me pass the paper to Iris, then picked it up from the floor when it fell off my book.

Stupid Math book. I knew I hated the subject for a reason.

Maybe there's still another way. I just need to—

"You know what? Why don't I let you think hard on it? In the meantime, I'm keeping this list." Denton moves to slip the paper into his pocket.

"Wait!"

He stops then smirks at the panic in my voice. "Ah, so it is significant. Busted."

Crap.

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"W ell?" Denton stares at me across the booth, his strawberry milkshake untouched while I take my time drinking mine.

After he caught me in Math class, I agreed to tell him everything. But I didn't want to risk anyone else overhearing us. Iris doesn't even know about this new development. But I know, when we met in the cafeteria earlier today, she suspected that something was up. I don't want to keep it a secret. I just don't want to tell her until I can figure out what to do.

So I convinced Denton to miss swim practice and meet me at Joe's Café after school. Now here we are, sitting in a corner booth inside the café-slash-diner that Iris and I love to frequent. Well, along with the rest of the McKinley High student body.

Which means I'm also taking a risk here.

Great. Now, I'm doubting my decision to meet here.

Maybe I should've just asked Denton to come by my house instead. Under the guise of doing homework, of course. I couldn't have my parents thinking that we were dating. They'd surely demand to know everything about him—nosy folks that they are. And that would be the last thing I'd want.

So I guess I did choose a "better" option.

I sigh. "Why do you even want to know? Are you bored with your life or something?"

"Just curious." He shrugs before leaning forward, mischief glinting in his eyes. "Is it a list of guys you've hooked up with? Funny, because I don't remember Con and Jase telling me about you."

By Jase, he means Jason Moss—who's also on the list and happens to be his friend.

I shoot him a glare. "I didn't hook up with them. Or the rest of the boys on the list." Though there's a part of me that wishes that I did. I sure wouldn't be in this position. "It's just a list of, uh, guys I find cute. Yeah, that's it."

Narrowing his eyes on me, he takes out the yellow paper from his jean pocket and places it on the table—close to him so I won't be able to snatch it.

Maybe I can still make a break for it.

But he dashes my hope when he rests his hand on top of it.

Ugh. One way or the other, I'm getting that list back. I can't have anyone else find it. And this time, I'm keeping it at home. I can't risk bringing it to school again.

His eyes bounce between me and the list, narrowing even more. "Why don't I believe you?"

"Because you don't want to believe the truth?" I grab my milkshake to finish it off.

"Nah. Because you're clearly lying."

I scowl at him in irritation. Of course, I'm lying. But why can't he just accept my flimsy excuse? "Then what do you think is the truth?"

He is so annoying. Why does he care so much about this? Doesn't he have anything

better to do? Like going to swim practice?

You convinced him to miss it, you dodo.

Right. Ugh.

I'm just glad I didn't put his name on the list. Or I'd feel even more humiliated right now. But the thing is, I did plan to include him. I even thought of putting him right after Conrad.

Because Denton Chase is even more good-looking than his friend. Although he's less popular than the latter—maybe just a little bit—he has no problem getting girls either.

Like I said, he's tall. He has golden blond hair that is slightly tousled. Light brown eyes that always spark with mischief. And those dark eyebrows that frame said eyes perfectly. Add in that cocky smirk that he always seems to wear—he's definitely winning in the looks department.

But for some reason, I never got around to adding him to the list.

"You said you didn't hook up with these guys. So my next guess is you're planning to kiss all of them. That's why you called it 'the kiss list,' right?"

Oh, right. This is the reason.

I scrunch up my nose. "Eww, no. I'm just looking to kiss one of them." I realize my mistake as soon as I say the last word. "N-No," I sputter. "That's not what I meant. I mean—"

"Oh, I think that's exactly what you meant." Denton is now grinning like a Cheshire cat. He leans back against the seat, folding his arms across his chest. "So are you

looking to hook up with one of them? I assume Con is your top candidate since he's first on the list."

"No." I glare. "One kiss. That's all I need."

"Oh-kay," he chuckles. "Why?"

"Do I really need to explain everything to you?"

"I missed swim practice for this, Perry," Denton says in a dry voice.

And that's my problem? If he had just minded his own business, we wouldn't be here right now. I didn't even want this. Really, it was his fault.

"Fine." I puff out a breath. "The truth is, I've never been um..." I can't believe I'm telling him this.

"Never been what?" he prods.

"Never been kissed, okay? I've never been kissed. And I'd like to change that before my seventeenth birthday, which is only a month away. So I made a stupid kiss list to make it happen. Happy now?" I snap, glaring at him hard, cheeks pink with embarrassment.

God, I hope this stays between the two of us. I can't have him spilling the information to his friends. People finding out would be bad enough. But the actual boys on the list knowing about it? That would be humiliation with a capital H.

And then what? I'd beg my parents to transfer me to another school? No, the humiliation would likely follow me there. Homeschool would be the right choice.

Denton just stares at me while I silently freak out once again. "Wow."

I cross my arms over my chest defensively. "Go on. Laugh. I know you want to."

And run and tell your friends. Not that I'm voicing that out loud. I'm not that dumb to give him ideas.

He just continues to stare at me. Until a smile slowly creeps up his face. "Oh, I'm not laughing. On the contrary, I'd like to help you out with your problem."

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"M ind if we sit here?"

I stop midchew of my burger and stare wide-eyed at Denton, who's standing next to the table Iris and I are currently having lunch at with none other than his best friend Conrad.

"Err, sure," Iris answers for the both of us, giving me a deer-in-the-headlights look.

I quickly swallow my food, nearly choking on it. Panicking, I grab my soda can and take a large gulp.

Denton smirks at my obvious shock. He places his lunch tray on the table and sits next to Iris, forcing Conrad to sit next to me.

Iris is still visibly stunned. She's probably wondering what's going on, especially since I haven't told her about the whole Denton-is-blackmailing-me thing yet.

It's not that I intended to keep it a secret up to this moment. In fact, I was just about to tell her when Denton showed up.

And showed up, he did. I can't believe he brought Conrad over to our table. What is he even planning to do? We never actually got to talk about the details yesterday. Because right after Denton told me he wanted to "help" me get my first kiss, he got a call from his Mom asking him to run an errand for her.

So I literally had no idea that he would do something like this. I was just as surprised as Iris. I just wish I knew what Denton was up to.

I narrow my eyes on him.

"Oh, sorry." His smirk widens. "Did we interrupt something? I just thought that since we had to work on our History project together, we could make use of lunchtime to discuss it."

"What History project?" Iris frowns at Denton, then at me. She seems to have snapped out of her momentary shock.

"I'd like to know the answer to that too," Conrad says, confusion infusing his tone. "I didn't know there was a project."

"Oh, it's a special one. Right, Perry?" Denton winks at me.

Seriously? Of all the excuses he could think of, he had to choose that? Everyone at this table is in the same History class. It's been weeks since we were last given any kind of project. And Iris and Conrad know that.

Amateur.

"An extra credit assignment," I tell them. "Yeah, uh, for Denton. He asked for my help with that since he, uh, kinda sucks at History."

It's Denton's turn to narrow his eyes on me. "Oh, is that right?"

I shrug one shoulder.

What did he expect me to say? It was his fault for using that excuse anyway. I merely improvised. Besides, it wasn't exactly a lie. He wasn't that good at that subject.

"Uh, I think I'm gonna go back to my table now. I'm not even sure why I'm here,"

Conrad says, rising from the bench and taking his food tray with him. "Good luck on that extra credit, man," he tells Denton before walking away.

"Hey, wait," Denton calls out to his friend, but to no avail. Ignored by Conrad, he scowls and then swivels his gaze to me. "You didn't even try to stop him. That was your chance, and you blew it."

"Oh, really?" I glare. "Was I supposed to jump him here right here?"

"Jump who?" Iris interjects.

Denton and I ignore her.

He snorts. "Of course not. But I gave you an opening. You were supposed to take advantage of it."

"You're seriously calling that an opening? A 'special project,' really? So lame."

"And your extra credit assignment was any better? You know, for someone desperate to get her first kiss, you're being annoyingly uncooperative."

"I had to improvise! And jerk, please. I'm not that desperate."

He laughs. "So you admit that you're at least a little—"

"Whoa, wait. Back up a bit." Iris holds up a hand to stop our bickering, then gapes at Denton. "You know about that?"

"Yeah. He knows about the kiss list," I confirm, blowing out an annoyed breath.

Iris quickly takes a sip of her Coke, as if she needs it to help with the shock of finding

out the truth. I'm not even the least bit surprised when she nearly chokes on it. Coughing a little, she asks, "You told him about that?"

"She did," Denton answers just as I say, "He found my list. I didn't have a choice."

Iris turns to him. "And now you're...?"

"Helping her."

"Blackmailing me."

I snap my gaze to Denton, glaring at him. Helping me? As if.

The annoying jerk just flashes a mocking smile.

"Um, what?" Iris laughs, thinking we're joking. But when neither of us laughs with her, she shakes her head. "Can you please explain?"

"I'll explain later," I tell her, shooting Denton another glare. "It's kind of a long story."

"It's really not," Denton scoffs. "It can be explained in two to three sentences."

I roll my eyes. "Ignore him. He's just being annoying."

Iris lets out another laugh.

We both stare at her.

"What's funny?" I ask with a frown.

"The two of you. You look and sound like a bickering couple. I find it cute."

I gasp dramatically. She didn't just say that. "Take that back."

Denton scowls at me. "Don't act too horrified at the prospect."

Iris is full-out giggling now. Clearly, she finds us entertaining.

"You know what?" Denton snaps, still looking a little annoyed. "We're getting off-track here. There's a party at Jase's tomorrow night. His parents will be out of town so he's taking advantage of it. Con will be there. So you'll get another chance to kiss him. I suggest you show up and make your move." He turns to Iris. "Maybe go with her so she'll be able to pull it off this time." Then shooting me a glare, he picks up his tray and leaves.

"What is his problem?" I mutter, scowling after him.

Iris finishes off her sandwich in one big bite and grins. "Guess we're going to Jason Moss's party."

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"I 'm not sure this is a good idea," I say in apprehension, staring at the house across the street through the passenger window of Iris's car.

"Seriously? You couldn't have said that when we were getting ready an hour ago in your bedroom?"

I chew on my cherry-flavored bottom lip, my eyes still fixed outside. "I know. I'm just really nervous."

"You're not obligated to kiss Conrad at this party—you know that, right? No one's forcing you to do it."

"Well, Denton might."

"I'm pretty sure he merely suggested it."

I shift on my seat to face her. "You've seen how determined he looked yesterday."

"Good point. Honestly, I still can't believe he's helping you carry out your plan. Are you sure he didn't ask anything in return?"

I shake my head slightly, careful not to ruin my messy ponytail. "Not a thing. Maybe he's Cupid incarnate or something. That, or he's just really nosy and has nothing better to do."

"Or maybe," Iris draws out, arching a perfectly lined eyebrow, "he wants to get that kiss for himself."

A laugh bursts from my lips. "You're kidding, right?"

She has to be. Because there's no way that's true. I never got that vibe from him. Not even a little bit.

"I mean, think about it. Why does he care so much? His interest doesn't seem normal."

"Maybe because Conrad is his best friend, and he wants to make sure that Conrad won't be taken advantage of or something."

"Uh, what? That doesn't make any sense."

I roll my eyes. "Whatever. Let's just get this thing over and done with. I need to know if Conrad's the one or if I have to cross his name out early in the game."

"Oh, this is a game now?"

"Ugh. You know what I mean. Come on." I push the car door open and climb out.

While I wait for Iris to get out of her car, I smooth down my purple chiffon skirt that flows around my knees. I paired it with a white sleeveless top and open-toe heels. I didn't bother with a clutch. Thankfully, my skirt comes with a pocket that has enough room to hold my phone and a few dollar bills tucked in a coin purse.

"Ready to make a move on your potential toad, princess?" Iris appears next to me, looking gorgeous in her dark blue dress that skims her thighs. Maybe she'll find a "toad" for herself too.

Taking a deep breath, I let Iris pull me toward Jason's house.

A few kids from school wave and smile at us as we stroll over the front lawn. Iris and I love to sit by ourselves at lunch, but we're not exactly unpopular around the school. We socialize in different circles when we want to.

The front door's open so we easily let ourselves inside. Jason's parties usually involve pounding music, but that's not the case right now. The music is a little mellow, and I can easily hear the conversations around us.

"Is it just me or does this party seem a little lame?" Iris whispers next to me.

Come to think of it, the house isn't crowded with people—which is usually the case with Jason's parties.

"I don't know," I whisper back. "What's going on?"

"Look, there's Denton. I'm sure he knows what's up."

Sure enough, Denton's across the room. Dressed in a red shirt and dark jeans, he's talking to Conrad and Jason—both in gray shirts—holding a blue plastic cup in his hand.

"And two of your potential toads are with him right now. How convenient," Iris chuckles. Then before I can say anything, she's pulling my arm and dragging me toward them. "Hey, guys."

The three of them turn their heads in unison.

Denton flicks up an eyebrow when our eyes lock, his gaze sweeping over me slowly. Then he nods, as if showing approval of my outfit.

As if I need it.

When I roll my eyes at him, he just smirks. "Nice of you to make it, Perry."

I narrow my eyes on him. "Rude not to accept your invite, Chase."

Sensing the tension between us, Conrad clears his throat. "How's the assignment going?"

I blink at him. "Assignment?"

"The one you're working on with Denton, remember?" Iris reminds me, her eyes widening a little.

Right. The fake assignment.

"Oh, yeah. That assignment." I laugh awkwardly. "Slipped my mind for a second there."

Jason lets out a groan. "Can we not talk about school right now? We're having a party here."

"Oh, are you?" Iris says sarcastically. "I thought you were having a tea party instead."

I bite back a laugh.

Conrad coughs in his fist.

Jason focuses his dark brown eyes on Iris and then scoffs. "You can thank Denton for that. He said the low music would be good for a change."

I narrow my eyes on Denton who has a secretive smirk playing on his lips. What is he planning to do now?

"Well," Denton draws out, "I was just thinking—when was the last time we played 7 Minutes in Heaven? 8th grade? It's been a while."

Jason snorts at that. "Try sixth grade."

"Point still stands," Denton says.

"Oh, does it?" I mock.

That's what he's been planning? 7 Minutes in Heaven? How lame can he be? Then again, this is exactly what I've wanted from the beginning. And two of the guys on the list are present. Who knows when I'm going to get this chance again? I have to, at least, see where this is going.

"Okay, I'm in," I announce.

"Of course, you are, Perry." Denton taps my nose, making me scowl.

"I'm not playing," Iris says. "But I'm definitely watching. Something tells me this is going to be entertaining."

Conrad chuckles. "I think I'm going to do the same."

I exchange a panicked look with Denton. What now?

"Hey, that's crazy talk," Denton protests. "No one's exempted. We're all playing."

"Seriously?" Jason groans. "Man, you owe me for this."

"You'll manage," Denton chuckles, patting his friend on the back. "Let's gather everyone."

"Wow. He's really serious about helping you," Iris mutters as we watch the boys round up everyone in the living room. "Maybe you should just kiss him."

I whip my head to her so fast I almost get dizzy. "You're joking, right?"

"I don't know why he's not included in the list anyway. Honestly, he's the most good-looking one among his friends. His name should be on your kiss list. Heck, he should be on top, not Conrad."

"Maybe you should kiss him," I grumble. But why does the idea of my best friend kissing Denton bother me a lot?

Because if anyone's kissing Denton Chase, it's me.

Now, wait a minute. Where did that thought come from?

I shake my head to clear it. I must be losing my mind. Must be the desperation to kiss someone before my seventeenth birthday.

Yeah, I'm fully admitting that now.

I'm desperate. No shame in that anymore.

"Okay, everyone. Find your seats, uh, anywhere." Denton waves a hand in the direction of the couches. "And then we'll start."

"What is this? Middle school?" someone asks loudly.

Laughter follows.

Denton narrows his eyes in their direction. "No one's forcing you to be here,

O'Malley. Door's open. You can leave."

Greg O'Malley and his friends stay still, not even moving an inch. While they look properly chastised, no one dares to talk back.

They're on the swim team, and they clearly don't want to piss off their captain.

Conrad clears his throat. "Okay, let's do this."

Denton nods. "I'll pick the couples."

"Why do you get to pick?" Jason protests, shoving his fingers through his thick black hair. "Can't we just draw out names or something?"

"That would take a lot of time. This will be a lot faster." Denton pauses, then smirks. "I choose Maisie and Conrad for the first couple. Go and enjoy the privacy of Jason's room for seven minutes." When Jason starts to protest again, he says, "You want us to use your parents' bedroom?"

Jason glares at him. "The guest bedroom, genius."

Denton rolls his eyes. "Fine. The guest bedroom. Conrad, take Maisie there."

Conrad exchanges indecipherable looks with Jason before turning to me. "Why don't you go ahead, Maisie? I'll be there in a minute."

"Um, okay." I try not to look excited, but when I glance at Iris, I notice that she's suppressing a laugh. Which tells me I'm failing at hiding my emotions.

Whatever. I'm getting my first kiss before the night ends. And that's all that matters.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 6:50 am

W hat's taking Conrad so long?

It's been five minutes and he still hasn't followed me into the guest bedroom. And now I'm pacing the floor, waiting for him to walk through the door—which I conveniently left open.

Wait. What if he changed his mind? I mean, I have no idea what's going on downstairs. For all I know, he already left the party.

Oh, please no. That would be the most humiliating thing to happen to me. I don't think I'll ever—

"Guys, seriously. This isn't funny."

Is that Denton? What is he doing here?

I move toward the door just as Denton stumbles inside. Conrad and Jason are right behind him.

I blink at them. "Uh, what's going on?"

Conrad shoots me an apologetic look. "Sorry, Maisie. Change of plans."

"Have fun," Jason chuckles. Then before anyone can react, he's closing the door, leaving me alone with Denton.

I gape at it, then at Denton who's rubbing his arm.

"I think Jase bruised my arm, the jerk," he mumbles.

"Forget that. What are you even doing here?" I snap, crossing my arms over my chest. "Conrad was supposed to be the one in here with me, not you."

"Yeah. Well, he and Jase practically dragged me all the way up here."

"Why?" I frown at him, then stare at the door when I hear something. "Is it just me or did the music get louder?"

Denton scowls. "It's not just you. I think it's safe to say that we're the only ones playing the game."

"So your 7 Minutes in Heaven idea is an epic fail. Of course, it is. You know what? You can play it alone. I'm out of here." I reach for the doorknob, but it won't budge. "What the heck?" I try again, but it's not working. I turn to Denton. "Why can't I open the door?"

"What did you do?"

"Nothing." I step aside and let him see for himself.

"Well, crap. They locked us in."

"Wait a minute. Are you telling me we're stuck in here? Oh, no, no. I'm calling Iris." I fish my phone out of my pocket and quickly dial my best friend's number. But it just rings until her voicemail picks up.

Ugh.

"Think she can hear your call over the loud music?"

"I'll just shoot her a text."

Hey, Denton and I are locked in the guest bedroom. Can you get us out?

Iris responds not even a minute later. You want to kiss someone at this party, right? There's your chance. See you in seven minutes. Have fun! xx

"No," I gasp.

"Let me guess, she's not coming."

I whirl around to face Denton who's now sitting on the bed. "This is all your fault, you know. We wouldn't be here if it wasn't for your meddling."

He hangs his head. "I'm sorry, okay? I really thought it would work."

Wow. Did he really just apologize? That was the last thing I expected him to do.

I release a defeated sigh and plop down on the bed next to him. "Forget it. It was a waste of time anyway. So I'll be a seventeen-year-old girl who's never been kissed. Who cares? I'm not the only one on that boat. I should never have made it into a big deal in the first place. Maybe I'll find my luck when I turn eighteen."

"Why are you giving up so soon? We've just barely started. I really think we can do this," Denton says earnestly, scooting a little closer to me.

I stare at him in wonder. "You really want to help me, huh?"

"I really do."

As our gazes remain locked, I can't help but notice how good he looks under the

warm light of the bedroom. And how alone we truly are.

"Maybe you should just kiss him."

Ugh. Why did Iris plant that seed in my head? Now, I can't stop thinking about it.

"His name should be on your kiss list. Heck, he should be on top, not Conrad."

No, I shouldn't even consider doing it. Because I have a feeling that it would make things complicated. Or, at the very least, awkward.

Denton is kind of starting to grow on me. Kissing him will surely change our dynamic.

But what if it doesn't? What if it turns out to be good? You'll never know until you find out...

This is really Iris's fault. I wouldn't be thinking about Denton this way if it wasn't for her stupid suggestion.

Then again, maybe I should just stop thinking too much and just go for it.

"You know what? Just let me think of another—"

I press my lips against his, effectively interrupting him before he can even finish the sentence. But the kiss doesn't last for more than a couple seconds.

Denton's eyes are as wide as saucers when I pull back, shock stealing his features.

Oh, my God! I can't believe I did it.

I cover my mouth with a shaking hand, my heart thrumming wildly in my chest. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I wasn't thinking straight."

He swallows hard, his eyes suddenly intense. "No. I think you know exactly what you were doing," he whispers. Then his lips are on mine once again.

Now, my eyes are the ones rounded in shock.

Denton is kissing me softly, unhurriedly, as if assuring me that I can pull away any time I want. But instead of doing just that, I stay put and shut my eyes, relishing the feel of his lips on mine.

Then slowly, tentatively, I begin to mimic the movement of his lips. Just as softly. Just as unhurriedly.

My heart is beating so hard in my chest, I can hear it loudly in my ears. My eyes remain closed even when Denton stops.

"That's exactly what a first kiss should be, Perry," he murmurs softly.

Swallowing hard, I finally open my eyes, expecting to see him smirking.

But there's only seriousness on his face...and something else.

But before I can dwell on it, the door springs open, startling both of us apart. So much so that Denton ends up falling off the bed.

Mind still clouded by what just happened, I can only gape at him.

"Dude, what are you doing on the floor?" Jason snickers from the doorway.

Iris, who's standing next to him, gives me a sheepish look. "Sorry it took longer than seven minutes."

I shake my head to clear the haze. "Yeah, uh, I think we should go." I rise to my feet and head for the door, grabbing Iris's arm on the way out, not even bothering to say my goodbyes to the two boys.

"Thanks for coming!" Jason calls after us as we head downstairs.

"It's been fun," Iris calls back with a giggle. "See you at school!"

I don't want to look over my shoulder, but I can't help but wonder if Denton has followed us out. Or is he still sprawled out on the floor?

Ugh. Why do I care? It was just a kiss.

My first kiss.

And as much as I hate to admit it, it was everything I thought it would be. Even though my foot didn't pop.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 6:50 am

"O kay, spill it."

I stare at Iris over the top of the book I'm reading. "Uh, hello to you too."

She drops on the couch across from the loveseat which I'm currently occupying and glares at me. "I can't deal with the suspense anymore. What happened in that room last night?"

I roll my eyes and set the book down on the coffee table. "You couldn't wait till Monday?"

"Nope. The suspense is killing me. So stop making me wait and tell me what happened."

I sit up straight and redo my sloppy ponytail. "Who let you in anyway? Mom's out buying groceries. I'm the only one home."

"Easy. The door's unlocked. You should've checked when your mom left."

I just shrug my shoulders. "I was busy reading a book."

She waves a dismissive hand. "Shut up about the book. Just tell me."

"So impatient." I laugh, then blow out a breath. "Fine. I kissed Denton. Happy?"

She gasps, her eyes widening. "You did it? You really did it?!"

I bite my lip to stifle a wide, goofy grin. "I really did."

"Oh, my God!" Iris laughs. "Okay, so how did it happen?"

"Because of you." I scowl at my best friend. "You egged me to kiss him, remember? So when I had the chance, I went for it."

"Was it good? What was his reaction?"

"It didn't last for more than a couple seconds. But obviously, he was shocked." My cheeks burn at remembering what followed after that.

Her eyes narrow. "Maise, why are you blushing right now?"

"Give me a break, Iris. I just had my first kiss last night." But I'm avoiding her gaze, knowing she can easily see through me.

"Then why aren't you looking at me?"

"Because prolonged eye contact is sooo awkward."

"No, that's not it." Iris goes quiet. And for a second, I assume she's dropped it. But nooo. "Oh, my God! He went back for seconds, didn't he? You had your first kiss and second kiss in one night!"

Of course, she figured it out. She knows me too well.

I cover my face with both hands and nod. "I did. I really did."

"Told you he'd be the best choice for your first kiss," she says in a smug voice.

I sigh. "Yeah, you did."

"Bestie, I'm so happy for you. You've wanted this for like, what, a week? And now you got it. We should celebrate."

I groan, covering my face once again.

"What are we celebrating?"

I remove my hands from my face to see Mom staring at us from behind the couch, with two grocery bags in her arms.

"Need help?" I offer.

She shakes her head and smiles. "It's okay, hon. I can manage. So what are you two planning to celebrate?"

"Maise had her first and second kisses last night," Iris answers before I can stop her.

"Iris!"

She winces. "Sorry. I couldn't help it. I'm just so happy for you."

"Ugh."

"Second kiss?" Mom narrows her dark brown eyes on me.

"It was the same boy," Iris quickly responds.

"And when do I get to meet this boy?"

I open my mouth to tell her that I'm not even dating Denton, but I'm not so sure she'll take it nicely. So I settle on a simple answer. "I don't know, Mom. Maybe never."

"Well, if you want to date this boy, then I want to meet him."

"Fine," I finally say.

Not that it's ever going to happen. I have no plans of dating Denton Chase. And I'm sure he's on the same page on that matter.

But why does the thought upset me?

This is all Iris's fault! I turn to glare at the culprit. See what you did?

"Sorry," she mouths sheepishly.

Again, ugh.

I'm up in my room—finishing the book I'd been reading before Iris interrupted me—when my phone buzzes with a message.

"What now?" I say with a groan, dropping my book on the bed next to me and frowning at the ceiling.

Is Iris not satisfied with everything I told her? I didn't even leave anything out. She made sure of that. So why the heck is she texting me?

But it's not her.

Hey, it's me. Denton. I hope you don't mind, but Jase gave me your number.

My heart skips a beat. He's texting me now? And how did Jason...

I shake my head and type a quick response. It's fine. But how did he get my number? I don't remember giving it to him.

Denton: He got it from Iris. Turns out they're texting now.

"What?!" I gasp out loud, sitting up against the headboard. My fingers move furiously. No way!

Denton: Yep.

Me: She was here this afternoon and she didn't tell me.

That little sneak. Is that the reason why she kept on grilling me about Denton? So there was no way I'd ask about Jason? I never even had the slightest idea. At all.

Oh, I'm so going to call her out on it.

Denton: Uh-oh. Did I just get her in trouble?

A giggle bursts from my lips before I can stop it. Because apparently, Denton's making me giggle now. One kiss and you're acting silly.

But it wasn't just a single kiss, was it? It was two kisses. Two good kisses.

I'm full-on smiling now. Oh, yeah. And I'll point her to you when she asks who the snitch is.

Denton: Really, Perry? After the night we've just had? That's cold.

I bite my thumb as I stare at the text. How should I respond to this? I can't believe he brought it up so casually. Isn't he feeling awkward about it? Because I am.

Honestly, I don't even know what I'll do when I see him at school on Monday. Whether I like it or not, last night changed everything between us. Denton was supposed to help me find the right guy out of my kiss list—not kiss me himself. But that's exactly what happened, and now I'm dealing with the aftermath.

Looks like I'm the only one feeling conflicted about the kiss though. Because judging from the text message, Denton doesn't even seem affected by it. Heck, he's just probably going to downplay it when I see him.

And I should do the same.

But why does the mere thought upset me?

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 6:50 am

"S houldn't you be happy right now? All you wanted was a kiss before your seventeenth birthday, right? You said you didn't even want a boyfriend."

I glance up from the pasta I'm playing around with my fork and frown at Iris. "What makes you think I'm not happy?"

"Because you're being all mopey. You've barely even touched your food."

I shrug. "Maybe I'm just not hungry."

"Or maybe it's because of Denton."

I scowl at her. "What about him? He helped me get what I wanted, remember? I'm done with him."

Are you, really? Then why can't you stop staring at him across the cafeteria? Why are you irritated with the girl at his table who's busy flirting with him instead of eating her lunch?

Because she's wasting good lunch, that's why.

Yeah, that's it. I'm not affected by the flirting at all. So what if a girl is flirting with him? Good for him, right? Get it, Denton.

"You know, if you glare at them any harder, their table is going to catch fire."

With a scowl, I turn back to my best friend. "I wasn't glaring at anyone. I was just

wondering when you were going to tell me about Jason."

Iris gives me an innocent look. "What about him?"

I roll my eyes. "Please. You're so totally busted. I know that the two of you are text buddies now. Or probably even more than that."

Realization washes over her features. "Denton told you, didn't he? Oh, my God. You guys have been texting too!"

"So it's true," I say accusingly, totally ignoring the last part. "Why didn't you tell me? You came over to my house yesterday."

"Because the Denton thing was more important, duh. And I was planning to tell you anyway. Denton just beat me to it. Which we will definitely talk about in a minute."

"So how did it happen?" Again, I ignore the Denton thing.

She shrugs a shoulder. "While you were locked in the guest room with your chosen toad at the party, I kind of hung out with Jason." She chews on her bottom lip. "I know he's on your list, but I thought since he wasn't your first choice anyway, and there were a ton of guys on your list, well—"

"It's fine. He was like my fifth choice or something so it's cool. And that's totally beside the point." I waggle my eyebrows. "Define 'hung out.""

Iris rolls her eyes, then pops a couple fries into her mouth. "He just kept me company, that's all. Then before we let you guys out, he asked for my number. I gave it to him, and now we're texting. That's it."

"Uh-huh." I grab some fries from her plate. "You're leaving something out."

A wide grin spreads across her face before she lets out a squeal. "We're going on a date on Friday."

I let out a snort. "Knew it."

"You know, you and Denton are totally welcome to join us for a double date."

Yeah, that's never going to happen.

"That's a no for me. But you can ask the girl he's flirting with. Maybe she'd love to come. There's your double date."

Iris laughs. "You're totally jealous right now, aren't you?"

"Please," I scoff. "Why would I be jealous?"

She props her arm on the table and rests her chin on her palm. "I don't know, Maise. You tell me."

"I don't need to tell you anything. He can flirt with any girl he wants. I don't give a crap."

"Girl, I don't know who you're trying to convince—if it's me or you. But one thing's for sure, you're not doing a good job."

I scowl at Iris, but I can't bring myself to argue with that. Because even to my own ears, the words sounded unconvincing.

My eyes are glued to my phone, reading Denton's text message over and over again.

I still have your kiss list. Do you want it back?

I still haven't responded. I don't even know what to say. Should I get it from him? Or just tell him to simply throw it away?

I'm done with the list anyway. Not that I even managed to use it in the first place. But it still served its purpose. I still got a kiss out of it.

"What are you staring at?" Iris demands, pulling me from my thoughts, reminding me that we're in the girls' bathroom for a quick touch-up before going home. In fact, she's currently reapplying her lip gloss.

Before I change my mind, I shoot a quick text back to Denton, then shove my phone inside my bag. "I have to do something before we go. Can you give me fifteen minutes?"

She's my ride home so she'll have to wait for me.

"Okay, but hurry."

"Promise." I give my reflection a quick glance, making sure my hair is still neatly tucked in my ponytail. Good thing I already glossed my lips before I got the text.

And don't I look pretty in my red floral romper?

Yeah, I'm not going to think about why I'm checking myself out right before I meet him.

Iris arches an eyebrow at me through the mirror. "You're meeting Denton, aren't you?"

Two fellow junior girls turn in our direction at the mention of his name, so I shoot my

best friend a warning glare. But I don't bother denying it.

She smirks. "I knew it."

"Whatever. Just wait for me," I say, leaving the girls' bathroom without waiting for her response.

Denton told me to meet him outside the swim team's locker room so I head in that direction.

I shouldn't be nervous. It's not like I'm going to do something worth being nervous about. Yet my heart is pounding a little faster than usual. And I feel my hands getting clammy.

Maybe I'm feeling this way because—save for those texts—I haven't really talked to him yet. It's not that I was avoiding him or something. I just didn't know how to approach him. And it's not like he's been making an effort to look for me either. This is the first time I've heard from him all day.

Maybe because you stopped responding to his texts last night.

Wait. Was that why he was flirting with that girl at lunch?

I have no time to ponder that. I've already reached the swim team's locker room.

And sure enough, Denton's outside waiting for me.

My heart is thumping even faster now. It doesn't help that his eyes are determinedly fixed on me as I close the distance between us.

"Hey," I say awkwardly.

His mouth tilts at the corner. "Hey yourself."

"So, you're not in your swim trunks yet."

He's still wearing his school clothes—a black turtleneck shirt and blue jeans. And is it just me or does he look incredibly good right now?

He smirks. "Why Perry? Is that your way of saying you want to see me in them?"

I feel a blush warm my cheeks. "W-What? Of course not. That's not what I—" I cut myself off and shake my head. "You know what? Never mind. You can just throw it away." I spin on my heels to leave.

But Denton quickly grabs my arm, stopping me. "Wait. Just wait."

Slowly, I turn to face him.

He drops his hold on me and backs up a step. "Sorry. I was just messing with you."

Well, what else is new?

I purse my lips and cross my arms over my chest, saying nothing.

Exhaling a breath, he runs a hand through his golden blond hair. "I've been meaning to ask you something."

I just nod.

"Why did you kiss me?"

"W-Well, why did you?" I shoot back, my heart thundering in my chest once again. "I mean, I know I kissed you first. But why'd you have to go and kiss me too?"

"Because I wanted to."

My eyes go round at that. "Oh."

"Your turn," he says around a nervous chuckle. "Why did you do it?"

The blush is back on my cheeks. "The same reason you did."

A smile slowly creeps up his face. "So we wanted to kiss each other."

I can't help the identical smile that appears on my face. "Apparently."

For a moment, we just stand there, grinning at each other.

Denton clears his throat. "So, uh, your kiss list." He fishes the now-wrinkled yellow paper from his pocket and hands it over to me.

I take it. But instead of putting it inside my bag, I stare at the written names there. I made a kiss list, yet I never got around to kissing any of them. The one I ended up kissing was the boy who was never even there.

Iris's words ring in my head once again. "Or maybe he wants to get that kiss for himself."

I laughed at her when she said that. But as it turned out, she was right. Denton did want to kiss me. He literally just said so himself.

So what are you going to do with that information?

I lift my eyes to meet his gaze. "Can I ask you something?" I ask in a quiet, hesitant voice.

"Sure."

"You said you kissed me because you wanted to. But why? Why did you want to kiss me?" I ask nervously. "And be honest. No joking around."

"I don't know." He lifts a shoulder in a shrug. "At that moment, I just felt like it was the right thing to do. So I did." He scratches the back of his head and gives me a sheepish grin. "And okay—maybe because the kiss you gave me was too short, and it wasn't enough. I wanted more."

I stare at him, my heart thudding incessantly.

You wanted honesty, right? Now, you got it. You can walk away now and go back to Iris.

But I can't bring my feet to move. Not when I feel like I haven't got everything I need. Not when Denton is looking at me with a hopeful expression on his face.

Swallowing hard, I soldier on. "Do you still feel the same? I mean, do you still, um, want to kiss me?"

The sheepish grin comes back as he takes a step closer. "Only if you want me to."

I do. I really do.

I try to stifle a smile but fail. "I won't mind."

We share another goofy grin.

"Wait," I say. "That girl flirting with you at lunch—"

He chuckles, cutting me off. "Alice wasn't flirting with me. She was flirting with

Con."

My eyes widen. I had it all wrong? "Oh."

"Yeah. But glad to know you were paying attention."

I bite my lip. "Only a little."

The smug smirk on his lips tells me he doesn't believe me. "So what about your kiss list?"

I stare at the paper still in my hand. "What about it?"

"What are you going to do with it? Not kiss any of the guys in it, I hope."

I dart my gaze between him and the said list that started it all. Suddenly, I know exactly what I want to do with it. With a small laugh, I tear it into small pieces, letting it fall on the ground.

I'm going to pick up the trash, of course. I just had to make a point.

Denton's mouth curves into a wide grin, the satisfaction in his eyes clear. "Was that really necessary?"

I shrug my shoulders. "I can make another one if you piss me off."

I don't mean that, of course. There's only one boy I want to kiss right now, and he's standing in front of me.

"Then I'll make sure to never give you a reason to be pissed." Then his lips are on mine for the third time.

And this time, my foot ends up popping.

The End

Thank you for reading! Did you like this book? Please don't forget to leave a review.