

Tia??

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umm yeea...another story. so enjoy...xx

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1 - Chapter One

“I’m sure you’ll have a lovely time down there, Tia,” Sherman slurred as one of his friends gripped her arms and pulled them behind her back.

Tia looked around, worried. What the hell was he talking about? “Down there? Down where?”

Sherman motioned towards the well. “Where else?”

Tia took one look at the well, and then turned back to Sherman. “Are you freaking kidding me?” she yelled at him.

He shook his head. “Such language.”

“Okay, Sherman, I know you’re drunk, but just...stay calm. Chill. Lie down for a bit.”

“No, no. I’m pretty sure I can manage watching you fall down a well.”

“Do you know what could happen to me if I fell down a freaking well?”

“You could die.”

“Exactly!”

“Precisely.” Sherman clicked his fingers and one of his friend—the one that was holding her—started dragging her down the well. Her sunglasses dropped down to her nose.

“Sherman! No. Stop. Make him stop. Don’t be insane.”

“I’ll teach you to turn me down,” he snarled.

“This is insane,” Tia protested as the guy—what was his name again? Tom or something—continued to drag her towards the well. “All I did was refuse to...you know...with you. Throwing me down the well because of that is totally uncalled for.”

Sherman took a big gulp from his beer bottle. “Toss ‘er down, Tommy,” he said afterwards, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

“No,” Tia whispered fiercely to Tommy. “Don’t do it. You’ll get charged for murder if you kill me, and if you don’t, you’ll be charged with attempted murder. Do you want to have a criminal record at the age of sixteen?”

Tommy was obviously too drunk to understand a single word she was saying, because he completely ignored her.

“Don’t do it,” she begged him, using simple words. “You’ll kill me.”

He faltered then, but Sherman called out for him to push her down the well and asked him what the hell was taking him so long.

Damn Sherman.

“No, no, no, no, no!” Tia screamed as Tommy pushed her up over the edge of the well. She managed to just hang onto the rim.

Please let somebody hear me and come running to help me, she thought feverishly. She then realised it was three in the morning. But one could have hope.

“Okay, guys, this really isn’t funny. I’m getting scared now,” she said, attempting to climb up over the wall. “Please stop.”

“Have fun,” Sherman said before yanking her fingers upwards off the rim and pushing her down the well.

Tia screamed until she hit the water, plummeting straight down until she could feel her leg smashing into the bottom of the well. A streak of white-hot pain flashed up her leg. She scrambled upwards, gasping for breath once her head was above the surface. She groped around for her sunglasses and was relieved when she finally found them.

“You can’t just leave me in here,” she called up to him as he turned and started walking away with his friends.

Apparently they could.

“Dammit,” she muttered. “You people are downright inhumane, that’s what you guys are!” she shouted up to the mouth of the well, knowing that they couldn’t hear her.

Her leg was throbbing like hell, but she couldn’t stop treading the water, otherwise she’d sink. And die. Well, she wasn’t exactly treading water, as she was only treading with one leg.

“Sherman! Get me out of here,” she yelled.

There was no response. That drunken bastard. He was going to get it at school tomorrow. That is, if she lived to see tomorrow.

Dammit. She knew going out alone on a Sunday night wasn’t a good idea. She continued to tread the water. She was getting tired. Her left leg was weighing her down.

“Help,” she called. “Somebody help!”

In the far distance she could hear drunken laughter and shouts, but they all ignored her screams.

“This,” Tia muttered, “is why the country should ban alcohol.”

~

She was barely awake. Just awake enough to keep herself treading. She had fallen asleep a few times, but had quickly woken up when she began to choke on water.

And her left leg was hurting like a dog.

Suddenly, the head of a black-haired boy appeared at the side of the well. He was few years older than her, maybe.

“Do you need some help?” he asked her cheerfully.

“I cannot believe that you even needed to ask me that question,” she muttered.

He looked at her for some time. “I have a plan,” he finally said.

“Great!” She looked up. “Now get me out of here.”

“Before I proceed, I have a question to ask you.”

Tia scowled. “Fine, but hurry. My leg’s really hurting, and I’m really tired.”

“Are you fat?”

It took Tia several seconds to process the question properly. “*What?*”

He frowned. “Is that a yes?”

“*Get me out of here,*” she shrieked.

He started lowering the bucket. “Okay, okay. Jeez, it was just a question.”

“I don’t think knowing whether I’m fat helps the situation,” she snapped.

“Actually, it does. You see, if you’re fat, then there’s a greater possibility that the rope might break and you might fall back in again, which would—” he stopped talking when Tia shot him an inhuman glare and promised to make his life a living hell if he finished his sentence.

She grabbed onto the bucket, and he started reeling her up. The sharp metal rim of the bucket cut into her fingers, but she didn’t care. She was finally getting out of there.

When she got to the mouth of the well, the boy let go of the rope and caught her before she could go down with the bucket.

“Got you,” he said, lifting her out of the well. Damn, he was strong. Not that she was heavy or *fat* or anything like that, but he lifted her out without breaking a sweat.

She quickly slipped on her sunglasses before looking at him properly for the first time. “Uh, thanks. And I’m not fat.”

He grinned; looking at her face and then dropping his gaze down to the rest of her shivering body, taking in her flimsy clothes that were so wet they were probably transparent. “No, you’re not.” He took off his jacket. “Here. You look like you need this.”

“Thanks.” She took the coat, her teeth chattering. “Oh, crap. I just realised. Now I’ve made your jacket all wet.”

He waved her words away. “I’ll live. You said something about your leg hurting?”

“Uh, yeah, but...” she trailed off when she saw that he was in uniform. “Oh my God, are you going to be late for school now?”

He rolled his eyes. “So I’m skipping school for a day. At least I have good reason for it. Come on, there’s this café nearby where I can take a better look at your leg.”

“What are you, a doctor?” she asked, limping after him.

He stopped and put his arm around her, supporting her weight. “No, but my dad is. I used to be accident-prone when I was little, so I may just have experienced every single injury known to man. Or little boys, anyway.” He looked down. “That doesn’t look to good,” he noted, taking in the swollen and battered leg.

“You think?” she asked through gritted teeth.

“Does it hurt?”

“Surprisingly, yes.”

She felt his arms move and suddenly she was up in the air in his arms.

“Hey!” she protested. “What are you doing?”

“Carrying you. Don’t worry,” he assured her. “I won’t drop you. You’re not fat.”

She rolled her eyes. “What is it with you and fatness?”

He shrugged. “I don’t have anything against it, if that’s what you mean.”

She knew she had already said this once, but she was going to say it one more time: damn, he was strong. He was walking like she weighed nothing. Or maybe like she weighed a feather. Which basically weighed nothing.

He set her down in a chair after a while. She froze when she realised where she was.

“Here?” she asked him. “Of all the cafés in town, you had to choose this one?”

“What’s wrong with this one?” he asked her. “I like this one.”

“Yeah, well, my parents just happen to run this one,” she hissed. “Now get me out of here before they see me!”

And so he picked her up again and left.

“Is this one to your liking, miss?” he asked her sarcastically, stopping in front of a small café.

She nodded. “I like the colour of the seats. I guess they’ll have to do.”

He set her down in the chair opposite to him. “So,” he said, sliding into his seat, “I just realised I didn’t know your name. I’m Jet Renn.” He held out his hand.

“Tia,” she said, shaking his hand.

“Just Tia?”

“Just Tia.” She smiled. “Nice to meet you.”

He grinned back. “Nice to save you.”

Her eyes caught the badge on his uniform. “You go to St. Morgan’s? What year are you in?”

“Year Thirteen. Why?”

“I’m in Year Eleven.”

“Really? How come I haven’t seen you around before?”

“I’m new. Transferred in two weeks ago after the Christmas holidays.”

“Yeah? How do you like it so far?”

“It’s...interesting,” Tia said, thinking back to the first day she arrived at the school. When they saw that she wasn’t exceptionally pretty, they turned up their noses. When they found out that she wasn’t rich either, they had turned their heads. Of course, after a while, she had made some good friends. “What do you think?”

He laughed and shook his head. “Can’t wait to get out of there.”

“You’re in Year Thirteen, so you’re what, eighteen?”

“Just turned nineteen. I’m one of the oldest in my year. How old are you?”

“Sixteen. I’m going to be seventeen in May,” she added, not wanting to look like a child.

After a cup of hot chocolate, Tia was starting feel more human.

“Let’s take a look at that leg,” Jet said, lifting her left leg gently and put on his lap. He poked it in a few places, asking whether it hurt. “It’s broken,” he concluded after a while.

“Broken?”

“Yes, but you should go to the doctor to make sure. And possibly to get it patched up.”

“Great.” Tia groaned.

“So tell me, Tia. How did you come to fall into the well?”

“I didn’t fall into the well. I was pushed.”

“Pushed?”

“Yeah.” She rolled her eyes. “By that pervert Sherman Guest. He had one of his friends do it when I refused to sleep with him. He was drunk at the time, though.”

“You’re defending him?” he asked her, incredulous. “He pushed you down a well!”

“I know that,” she snapped. “But maybe he was too drunk to know what was going on,” she said after a while.

“Listen, if he was going to push you down a well, he would’ve done it whether he was drunk or sober. The thing is, well, he pushed you down a freaking well!”

She shrugged.

“So what are you going to do?” he asked her.

“Go to the doctor.”

“No, about Sherman.”

She shrugged again. “Nothing.”

“You’re going to let him get away with it?”

She sighed. “I don’t want to make a big fuss about this, I mean, he was drunk at the—”

“It doesn’t matter whether he was drunk or not!” Jet exploded. “He could’ve killed you.”

“I know,” she said. And so did Sherman, she thought dryly. “Just let it go, okay? It’s nothing.”

He looked like he wanted to tell her that it was something, a very big something, but he didn’t. “Fine.”

“Thank you.” She sat back for a while, her leg still on Jet’s lap.

She suddenly remembered seeing him around school, and why the name was so familiar to her. There she was, sitting with Jet Renn, one of the hottest boys at St. Morgan’s, and with her leg on his lap, too. Jet was the guy that all girls fawned over—even the ones that were older than him—and that all the boys followed. But for some reason, he didn’t seem to give a shoot.

She had seen him at school a few times, where most of the girls and the boys were trailing after him during recess. He just acted as if they didn’t exist, talking to only his close friends or sometimes reading, drawing, writing or listening to music and not talking at all. The followers, however, seemed content to just watch him.

Which struck Tia as disturbing and something only a stalker would do, but hey, to each their own.

“I think I should take you to your parents,” Jet said, finishing off his coffee.

She groaned. “Just when I was starting to like you,” she grumbled, and he laughed.

2 - Chapter Two

Her parents had made the biggest fuss over her when Jet was there and had thanked him profusely for saving her life and had also told him that they wouldn't know what to do with him. Jet smiled, embarrassed.

After Jet left, they told her off like there was no tomorrow and threatened to break her other leg if she ever went out alone again. She was grounded. And she had to use crutches. Luck was not on her side.

The next day, Tia had her sunglasses on as usual. She was extremely grateful that they didn't get lost when she fell down the well. She limped with her crutches to a nice position under a tree and leant against its trunk and was reading under the shade when someone scared the living shoot out of her.

"Hello, Tiana Green," Jet said, grinning and having seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

Tia yelped and had almost slipped and fell, but Jet caught her.

"How do you know my full name?" she demanded after she regained her balance.

He shrugged. "I looked it up on the school register. Took me a while, but I found it in the end."

"Goodie for you," she muttered. "But please don't call me Tiana. Tia is fine."

"What's wrong with the name Tiana? I like it."

"Yeah well, you would," she muttered under her breath.

"What did you say?"

"Um, nothing."

He looked at her suspiciously but left it alone. "So how're you feeling?"

"Better. My leg still hurts quite a bit. You were right: it is broken."

He grinned. "I knew it. It looked exactly like my leg when I crashed into a lamppost while riding my bike."

"Crashing into a lamppost while riding your bike won't make you break your leg."

"Not if you break the lamppost."

"Ah, I see. In that case, I'm surprised that you only broke your leg."

“I was lucky, I guess.”

Tia snorted. “Lucky enough to break your leg when you crashed into a lamppost while riding a bike?”

He laughed. “I was ten at the time, cut me some slack.” His face darkened suddenly, his bright blue eyes burning brightly.

“What’s the matter?” she asked him.

He looked at her. “Nothing,” he assured her. “Wait here, okay? I have...something to do. I’ll be back in a sec.”

She looked doubtfully at him. “Okay.”

He walked away, and Tia was about to look away when she saw him stride up to Sherman, his face angry and determined.

“Oh, crap,” she muttered.

Jet was talking to Sherman now, his voice low enough so nobody else would hear him. Sherman looked surprised, but after a while started talking back. Jet took care of that soon enough. When Jet was finally finished, Sherman was pale with fear.

“Hey,” Jet greeted her as he walked back towards her. “I’m back.”

“Didn’t I tell you not to do anything?” she asked him, frustrated.

“No, you said you weren’t going to do anything, so I decided to take matters into my own hands.”

“As much as I appreciate the gesture,” Tia said through gritted teeth, “I’d appreciate it even more if next time you didn’t take matters into your own hands.”

“Believe me,” Jet said grimly. “There’s not going to be a next time.”

Just then, Sarah—Tia’s best friend at St. Morgan’s—bounded over. Sarah never walked. She always skipped or bounded. She was a bubbly person. Tia sometimes wondered why she was her best friend.

“Tia,” she called excitedly. “There’s something I want to tell you!” When she saw Jet, her jaw dropped and her eyes bugged out. “Uh, hey Jet,” she stuttered. “What are you doing here?”

Jet smiled at her. “I was talking to Tiana.”

“It’s Tia,” Tia reminded him.

“I like calling you Tiana.”

She liked him calling her Tiana, too. He was the only one who managed to say it without making it sound

ridiculous.

She pursed her lips and looked away. "So, Sarah, was there something you wanted to tell me?"

"Uh, yeah. Carrie and I were wondering whether you would like a surprise birthday party."

Ah, lovely, bubbly, airhead Sarah. "Uh, Sarah," Tia said gently, "if you asked me whether I would like a surprise birthday party, then when you do eventually have a surprise birthday party, it wouldn't be so...surprising anymore."

Sarah looked upset for a moment, but she perked up again. "Well, now since that you know about the party, what theme would you like? Where do you want to hold it?"

"When is Tiana's birthday?" Jet asked.

"Two weeks from now," Sarah said before Tia could stop her.

"And am I invited to this party?" Jet asked Sarah.

Sarah giggled. "I'm sure Tia wouldn't mind."

Tia resisted the urge to kill something. "I have to go pee," she muttered before limping away as quick as she could on her crutches.

In the bathroom, Tia looked at herself in the mirror. She wasn't fat. Not too skinny, but definitely not fat. She sighed at the sight of her plain dark brown hair. It was straight and limp while other girls had bouncy, curly hair with highlights. Her hair was boring.

Her eyes were just plain frightening. They were so dark they were almost black. One had to look very close and shine a light under her eyes to see that they were actually a dark, dark blue. What was even weirder was that she had a wide silver stripe down her left eye. It streaked across the dark blue iris, disappearing only when the pupil took its place.

It was extremely disconcerting for people to look at her, with her dark blue eyes and the wide silver stripe, hence the need to wear sunglasses. Even Sarah hadn't seen her without her sunglasses before. She had more than ten pairs of sunglasses at home, and she made sure every pair had dark lenses so that the bright silver streak wouldn't show through them.

She readjusted her sunglasses before heading out again. Jet was talking to Sarah. He left just before she could join them.

"What was he talking to you about?" Tia asked Sarah, who was staring dreamily after him.

"You," Sarah said. "He told me what happened. He really cares about you." She shook her head. "I can't believe Sherman did that to you."

"Me neither."

“I mean, did he actually get Tommy to push you down a well?”

“Uh, yeah.” Not wanting to linger on this subject, Tia quickly made a comment about how Mr. Linkman looked like a frog and they had a nice little giggle over that.

3 - Chapter Three

Jet came to visit her about an hour after school. Tia had just finished taking a shower and was towelling her hair dry. Taking a shower really was very inconvenient when one of her legs was wrapped up.

“How did you find me now?” Tia demanded when he knocked on her door and went into her room.

“I went to visit your parents in the café at lunch. They were more than happy for me to come and visit you and keep you company.” He looked up then, his blue eyes flashing a startling shade of blue. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind,” she breathed.

They were getting along fine (her mother even invited him to stay over for dinner, which meant that she must really like him—which shouldn’t matter to Tia, but for some reason, it did) when he asked her a question. The question. (And in case some of the people who are reading this has weird minds, it wasn’t “will you marry me?”.)

“Do you wear your shades all the time?” he asked her, sitting down next to her on the bed.

She looked away. Could he see the stripe? “Uh, yeah.”

“Why?”

She took a deep breath. “Uh...I don’t have eyes,” she said, making a feeble attempt at a joke.

He laughed politely, but they both knew that they didn’t manage to fool the other.

“I have weird eyes,” she said finally, breaking an awkward silence.

“Weird eyes,” he repeated.

“Yes. Weird eyes.”

“Show me.”

“No!”

“Show me.”

“I warned you,” she told him before taking off her sunglasses. She grimaced inwardly before looking up at Jet. He stared back at her, unflinching.

“They’re not weird,” he said softly after a while. “They’re beautiful.”

A shiver ran through her. She regained her dignity by snorting—not exactly a very ladylike thing to do, but oh well. “Yeah right.”

“I’m serious. I think your eyes are beautiful.”

“Yeah, well, you’re weird.”

He grinned. “And it is only now that you realise this?”

She started to put her sunglasses back on again, but she felt a hand on her arm stop her.

“No shades,” he told her.

“No?”

“Not when you’re with me, anyway. Your eyes are nothing to be ashamed of.”

“I’m not ashamed of my eyes,” she protested.

“Then why are you hiding them?” he challenged her, and she looked away.

“It makes people uncomfortable to look at them,” she said finally.

“Then it’s their problem, not yours. From now on, when you’re with me, you’re not allowed to wear shades.”

She scowled. “You don’t get to tell me what to do.”

“On the contrary. I saved your life, so the least I get is to tell you what to do.”

“Fine. No sunglasses when I’m with you and you alone. Other people don’t get the privilege of seeing my *beautiful eyes*.”

He grinned. “That’s right. Only I am allowed to see those beautiful eyes.”

“Kids,” Tia’s mother called. “It’s dinner time.”

Jet followed Tia down the stairs and into the dining room.

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“Thank you for having me over for dinner, Mrs. Green,” Jet said politely.

“Call me Charlene,” Tia’s mother said, batting her eyelashes.

Tia suppressed a groan. The age difference didn’t stop her mother from flirting with other guys. The fact

that she was married didn't stop her either. Jet squeezed Tia's arm gently as if cringing from the eyelash-batting before letting go and sitting down next to her at the table.

Tia's dad came into the dining room along with Bingo, their energetic golden retriever. "Honey, we need a new dog. This one doesn't bark anymore. Oh, hello, Jet." Bingo headed straight for Jet's crotch area, sniffing tentatively.

"Hello, Mr. Green," Jet said, gently pushing away the dog's head. "Mrs. Green invited me over for dinner. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not," Tia's dad said, sitting down opposite to Tia. "You're a nice kid."

"Yes, he's such a kind boy," Tia's mother cooed, patting Jet's head before sitting down next to her husband. Bingo leapt up to lick Jet's face. "See? Even Bingo thinks so."

Tia shot Jet an apologetic look.

"So, tell us, Jet," her mother was saying, "How did you come to find Tiana down in the well?"

"Well, according to Tiana, she was—" Tia stomped on Jet's foot and he yelped. "—she fell down the well by accident."

"Yeah," Tia said, ignoring Jet's pained glare. "I fell."

"You fell into the well by accident?" her mother asked incredulously.

"I didn't fall into the well on purpose, if that's what you want to know," Tia snapped.

"Well, it's a good thing that Jet happened to stop by," her mother continued, ignoring her daughter's rudeness. "This should be the kind of boy you're dating, Tiana."

Tia flushed bright red at the same time while Jet grinned, obviously amused by her atrocious family.

"I don't think that was at all necessary, mom," Tia said after a while, her cheeks still hot.

"You should date a nice boy like Jet," her mother continued, totally ignoring her. "He's better for you than that Norman boy."

"It's Sherman, mom," Tia said through gritted teeth, "And I broke up with him."

"That's good." Her mother brightened up. "Now you're free to date Jet."

Tia bit down hard on her fork to stop herself from screaming and leaping across the table to strangle her mother. Was that woman totally insane?

Bingo placed his front paws on Tia's lap under the table. She fed him a piece of whatever kind of meat her mother had heated up in the microwave.

“Sorry,” she whispered to Jet. “My mom can’t cook to save her life.”

“It’s okay,” he whispered back. “This is better than what I usually eat every night.”

“And also, sorry about the whole...dating thing.”

He grinned. “I didn’t particularly mind that, either. You didn’t tell me you were dating Sherman Guest.”

She shrugged. “We weren’t actually dating.”

“Were you two exclusive?”

“Does us two being exclusive mean that he can go around sticking his tongue down Cheryl Bailiff’s throat?” she asked him dryly.

He choked on his food.

“Are you alright, Jet dear?” Tia’s mother asked him.

“I’m fine, Mrs. Green,” he choked out, “Thank you.”

“Sam,” Tia’s mother turned to her husband, “Go get Jet something to drink.”

Her dad muttered something about being a slave before getting up and pouring Jet a glass of water.

“Thank you.” Jet sipped gratefully at the water while Tia tried to control her laughter.

“Tiana!” her mother scolded her, “It’s not nice to laugh at people when they’re choking. Surely you should know that. I’m sorry, Jet, she may not seem very nice right now, but once you get to know her—”

“Mom, this is what made Jet choke in the first place,” Tia interrupted. “I’m done.” She turned to Jet. “Are you done?”

Jet nodded. He had a thoroughly amused smile on his face.

If they weren’t with her parents right now, she would have slapped the smile straight off his face.

“Jet and I are going to head upstairs.” She proceeded to drag Jet up the stairs.

“It’s not nice to drag people up the stairs, Tiana,” her mother called up to them. “Why, Jet probably thinks that you’re a rude and aggressive girl. How do you expect him to be your boyfriend when—”

Tia slammed the door shut.

“Sorry about that,” she muttered. “My mom likes to play matchmaker.”

“Evidently so.”

She changed the topic to something less embarrassing and soon they were talking about anything they came to mind: music, books, and favourite subjects etc. etc.

“I can’t do Maths to save my life,” Tia groaned.

“I find Maths easy,” Jet mused.

“Yeah, but you’re clever.”

“I can help you with your Maths, if you like.”

“Wow.” Tia brightened. “Does that mean you’ll do my Maths homework for me?”

Jet grinned. “No, it means I’ll help you understand Maths so you can do your Maths homework properly instead of writing down random numbers.”

“So...you’re going to do my homework for me, right?” She looked hopefully up at him.

He laughed. “You wish, Tiana.” He looked down at his watch. “It’s nine. I should leave now.”

“Oh, right. Sorry. I hope you don’t get into trouble with your parents.”

He looked a bit startled, but afterwards he gave a cold laugh. “My parents? No, I’m not going to get into trouble with them. My parents don’t give a shoot.”

Tia raised her eyebrows but smiled anyway. “Okay. Well, goodnight.” For a second she thought he was going to lean in and kiss her on the cheek, but he only leaned in to tap her left leg lightly.

“I hope you get better soon,” he said, smiling. “I’ll see you around.”

“Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

He frowned. “Oh. I’m...I’m not going to be at school tomorrow.”

“Oh? Why? Do you have more girls to rescue from the well?”

He laughed. “Maybe. Goodnight, Tiana. I’ll see you around.”

“Around,” she repeated. “Yeah.”

He shut the door close behind him and Tia was left on her own.

4 - Chapter Four

Jet wasn't at school the next day. Of course, Tia knew about this, but she was disappointed all the same.

"Miss Green," her teacher barked. "I know it's a Wednesday and it's the middle of the week, but that's no excuse for you to daydream."

"Sorry, Ms. Cutler," she murmured.

Ms. Cutler resumed her teaching while Tia resumed her daydreaming.

Jet didn't come to school on Thursday or Friday either. Tia wondered where he was.

Saturday dragged on for Tia. Usually she went out with Sarah and Carrie, maybe sometimes with Gary, one of her good friends, but this Saturday, she declined all invitations out, saying that she had homework to do. She did have homework to do, but she sure as hell wasn't going to do it on a Saturday. Besides, it was Maths homework. She wouldn't be able to understand it anyway.

She put her iPod on loudspeakers and Lady Gaga's voice blared out of the speakers. She grimaced, mentally cursing Carrie for putting Lady Gaga's songs on her iPod. And setting Love Game as her ringtone. "Let's have fun, this beat is sick, I wanna take a ride on your disco stick" wasn't really an appropriate song to have blaring out when you were staying down after school to talk to your teacher.

She changed the song so that Lady Gaga was no longer singing her heart out, and Supermassive Black Hole started playing. At least it was loud.

Someone knocked on the door and Jet poked his head in after Tia told whoever it was to come in and to make it quick because she just wasn't in the mood.

"Oh, it's you," she said.

"Hi."

Muse was crooning "ooh, oo-oooh, you set my soul alight" in the background. Tia abruptly took her iPod of the speakers.

"Uh, so. I haven't seen you for a while."

"Yeah. Can I come in?"

"Sure. Make yourself comfortable."

"So, where have you been for the past few days?" she asked him as he kicked off his shoes and sat

cross-legged down on her carpet.

He shrugged. "Not at school, that's for sure."

She knew he didn't want to talk about it, so she changed the subject. "Can you help me with my Maths?" She handed him her Maths homework.

"Quadratic formula. That's easy."

"No, it's not," she argued.

"Here, let me show you." He began to explain them to her. "So?" he asked her fifteen minutes later.

"I think I understand," she said, almost joyfully. This was the only time she understood Maths properly.

"Here. Do this one."

She obliged, and he grinned at her. "You've got it," he said.

"Thanks. I don't know what I would've done without you."

"Well, for starters, you would probably still be in the well."

She rolled her eyes.

"Speaking of wells," he said, "how's the guy who pushed you down one?"

"He hasn't spoken to me at all these few days. Didn't even look at me."

"That's good."

"Yes, it is."

He looked at her and caught her eyes "It is good, right?"

"Yeah, of course it is," she said. She didn't tell him about Sherman not talking to her and also telling the rest of the whole freaking year not to talk to her. Of course, with the exception of Sarah, Carrie, Gary and Letitia, the really nice girl who talks to everybody.

"Shades," he said.

She groaned. "Do I have to?"

"Off."

She warily took off her sunglasses and placed them among the others on her dresser.

“That’s a lot of shades.”

“I need them.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Well, I like wearing them.”

“Even at night? Doesn’t it make it really hard to see?”

She shrugged. “You get used to it after a while. I find it really bright right now.”

“Don’t worry; I’m sure you’ll get used to it after a while.”

She rolled her eyes at him.

“How’s your leg?” he asked her.

“It still hurts a bit, but otherwise it’s okay.”

“Good, good.”

“Are you staying for a while longer?” Tia asked him hurriedly, not wanting him to leave.

He looked down at his watch. “If you don’t mind.”

“I don’t,” she said quickly. “Although I suppose you should leave before dinner, otherwise you’ll have to endure that torture again.”

He grinned. “No, if I stay for dinner, you’ll have to endure the torture. I get to smile and be amused.”

She shot him a look.

“Alright. I’ll hide when you have dinner.”

“Wait, you have to pretend to leave, and then sneak back in the window.”

“Are you serious?”

“There’s a ladder at the back of the house. After you leave, just climb back in to my room again,” Tia said in a low voice, limping down the stairs and somehow dragging Jet with her.

“Fine,” Jet grumbled as she opened the door.

“Oh, be careful not to climb into my parents’ room by mistake,” she whispered to him.

His eyes widened. “How—”

“Bye Jet,” she called cheerfully before slamming the door in his face.

“Has Jet left already?” Tia’s mother asked in dismay.

“Yes, mom.”

“Such a shame. I was going to invite him over for dinner.”

“That’s why he left. He couldn’t stand the food.”

Tia’s mother clicked her tongue disapprovingly and told her not to lie before disappearing into the kitchen.

When Tia finally got back to her room, Jet was already inside, looking through her books.

“Whoa. That was fast.”

He grinned. “I was about to climb into your parents’ bedroom by accident when I heard your dad snoring, so I opted for the other window.”

“Wise decision.”

“You really like reading,” he remarked, gesturing towards her full bookshelf.

“Yeah,” she admitted. “I love reading. I used to read a lot, but I’m reading less and less now.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I just don’t have time anymore.”

“Never give up things you love for things you don’t like but need to do.”

“Is that why you don’t go to school?” she asked him suddenly. “To do the things that you love?”

He stared at her for a moment. “No,” he said softly after a while. “I don’t skip school to do things I love. I skip school to do what I have to do.”

Tia wanted to tell him that school was the thing that he had to do, but again she sensed his reluctance. This time she didn’t drop the topic. She wanted to know.

“Where did you go?” she asked him. “Why weren’t you at school?”

He looked at her for an immeasurable length of time. Finally, he shrugged. “I just don’t like going to school.”

“How about the thing you have to do?”

"It's nothing," he said, looking away.

"Tell me," she begged him.

"I will one day."

"Promise?"

He smiled at her, his hair falling across his bright blue eyes and making him sexier than ever.

"Promise."

5 - Chapter Five

Jet continued to skip school, and he usually skipped school every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, sometimes skipping on Monday as well. Whenever he was at school, he'd go talk to her at recess and eat lunch with her and her friends.

He visited her every few days, hiding in her bedroom. Tia would sneak him dinner and he would stay till really late, usually at twelve or even one in the morning, before leaving through the window.

Tia was dying to know where he usually went when he wasn't at school, but she didn't ask him again. She didn't want to push him. He'd tell her in his own time.

A month had passed and it was a Saturday night. Tia was just about to fall asleep when he heard a scraping sound against her window. Knowing it was Jet, her eyes opened immediately and she limped over to her window and helped him in. It was pouring that night, and Jet was dripping wet.

He was a bit drunk, if not very. Tia looked at her watch. It had just gone twelve.

"Jet, have you been drinking?" she asked him in a low voice.

He nodded.

"Are you okay?"

He nodded, and then shook his head. He sat down on her bed and buried his head in his hands.

Tia ignored the fact that he was making her bed wet and sat down next to him and put her arms around him. She could smell the alcohol. "What's wrong?" she asked him.

He lifted his head from his hands to look at her warily. "It's my sister's anniversary today," he said quietly after a while.

"Oh? What kind of anniversary? Her wedding anniversary?"

"No. Her death anniversary."

Tia froze. "I'm sorry," she said after a while. "How old was she when..."

"Nine." A pained look entered his eyes. "I killed Lily, Tiana," he said, his voice breaking. "I killed her."

If Tia wasn't frozen before, she surely was now. "What...what do you mean?"

He shook his head. "I killed my own sister," he whispered. "What kind of brother am I?"

She hobbled into the bathroom as quickly as she could to get the biggest towel she could find and wrapped the towel around him. "What...how did you kill Lily?"

He shook his head.

"How old were you?"

"Thirteen."

"Tell me what happened, Jet," she said softly.

She had to lean in really close to hear what he was saying, because he started talking really softly but also very quickly at the same time.

"I...it was an accident. We were alone in the house. I pushed her into a pool. She couldn't swim and—and neither could I. My friend had just left. I...I slipped and accidentally pushed her into the pool. I tried to...I called the police, but—but..." he trailed off.

"But it was too late," she finished for him gently.

He nodded. "I killed her, Tiana."

"Of course you didn't kill her. Jet, it was an accident."

"But it was my fault that she fell into the pool in the first place," he burst out.

Tia shushed him. "You'll wake my parents." She stood him up and walked with him towards the bathroom. "Here. Dry yourself off, okay?"

He stared dully into the mirror. "The face of a murderer," he muttered. "Staring right back at me. What kind of a brother am I?"

Tia turned around again to face him. "Jet, it wasn't your fault. It was an accident. I'm sure your parents understood."

He laughed. "My parents? No, Tiana, my parents did not understand. They scolded me for killing my sister. They told me I was the one who killed my sister. Lily was always their favourite. And she always will be," he said, his voice soft but dangerous.

Tia was shocked. "Your parents told you that you killed your sister?"

He laughed again. "They did more than tell me that. They reminded me. Every single day. Every time I made a mistake, they'd say 'how many Goddamn mistakes are you going to make? Is killing your sister not enough?'" He laughed again. "They told me all right."

He leaned in close to her. "My parents ruined my fracking life, Tiana," he said softly.

Tia's blood ran cold. This was the first time she had ever heard Jet use the word frack in all their conversations. The word shoot came up often enough, but he never said frack. Never.

Jet looked back at the mirror. "When my sister died, a part of me died with her. Then my parents killed the rest of me." He lashed out suddenly, his fist colliding with the mirror. It smashed into pieces.

Tia hurried over and grabbed Jet's hand. "You're bleeding now," she scolded gently as Jet went limp against her. She rinsed the blood and glass off his knuckles and bandaged them up after drying them.

She sat him on the edge of the bathtub and told him not move while she went to get a t-shirt and a pair of her dad's shorts in his room.

"Put them on," she said, looking away as he changed, and after helping him to her bed, she went back to the bathroom and cleared away the remains of her broken mirror, the sharp shards of glass cutting into her fingers. It was incredibly hard to kneel down with a broken leg. She rinsed her hands off afterwards and applied bandages to her cut fingers before curling up in the big armchair that was in her room and falling asleep almost immediately, letting her left leg rest on the floor.

~

When she woke up, she was in her own bed. She rubbed her eyes and sat up. Jet was sitting in the armchair, looking at her.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning."

"I'm sorry about breaking your mirror. I didn't even realise I broke it until this morning when I went into the bathroom and saw the broken pieces of glass in the bin." He held up his bandaged hand. "And thanks. For cleaning my hand up."

She smiled. "No problem. I hope you feel better now."

He nodded. "I get a bit depressed at this time of the year when the anniversary of Lily's death comes up." He walked over and held up her hand. "You've cut yourself."

She withdrew her hand. "I did that by accident when I was picking up the pieces of glass."

"I'm sorry."

"It's okay."

"Thank you. You could've just thrown me out. But you didn't." He groaned. "I've made a complete idiot out of myself, haven't I?"

"No, of course not," she assured him. It was nice to know that he had a dark side to him. He was always so cheerful and full of jokes all the time. Not that it was good that he had to suffer for his sister's

death.

He closed his eyes. "I have a terrible headache."

She grinned. "You have a British accent."

He opened his eyes again and grinned. "You've caught me. My family and I are English. We moved here a few years ago, but the British accent still slips in every now and then." He groaned again. "My head's killing me."

She got up from the bed with some difficulty. "Here. Sit. I'll go get you a Coke."

"A Coke?" he asked doubtfully.

"It cures hangovers."

"I thought that was water."

"Shut up and wait for the Coke." She took her crutches with her as she limped down the stairs at the speed of a snail.

~

"You're right," Jet said.

"I usually am, but what in particular am I right about this time?"

"Coke does cure hangovers."

"Told you."

He put down his Coke and looked straight at her, his sharp blue eyes making her shiver involuntarily. "Thank you, Tiana. For saving my life."

"I guess we're even, then. I have one question though: if your sister died six years ago...how did you cope before?"

He looked down. "...I always spent my sister's death anniversary in the hospital. My parents always found me just in time."

"See? Your parents do care."

He laughed another cold, bitter laugh. "The only reason they kept me alive was so that they could continuously remind me that I was the one who killed Lily. I remember last year, I was in the hospital again. The doctor there recognised me. He was my doctor almost every time. He said to my parents 'Sir, Ma'am, this isn't a good habit for your son'. Do you know what my parents said? They said 'Let him mourn for his sister's death. After all, he was the one killed her.' Scared the living shoot out of the

doctor, they did.”

She put her hand on his arm. “Listen. Lily’s death wasn’t your fault. If Lily was here right now, I can bet you anything that she would say that she’s forgiven you. Were you and Lily close?”

Jet nodded miserably.

“Lily would be...fifteen now,” Tia said, quickly doing some calculation. She was quite pleased with herself for getting it right, since she was absolute crap at Maths. “Do you think she’d want her brother to suffer for something that wasn’t his fault? If you don’t let go, she won’t be able to, either.”

Jet nodded again, staring into his can of Coke. He finished it and threw it into the bin. “Thank you, Tiana,” he said, standing up.

“Do you want to freshen up? I have a spare toothbrush.”

He gave a small smile. “You reminded me of Lily that night, when I saw you down in the well barely alive. I thought she was you for a second. I couldn’t kill another person. I couldn’t let another person die because of me. I was determined to save you no matter what.” He took the spare toothbrush from Tia’s hand and disappeared into the bathroom.

Tia stood there, not moving. She reminded him of his sister? Obviously their chance of a romantic relationship was now officially zilch. Great.

But she understood. He was grieving over the loss of his sister. Besides, he had just confided in her. He never confided in her. He refused to talk about himself, his family. His family...wouldn’t they be wondering where he was? Surely, they would think that he’d get himself into a mess this year as well.

She asked Jet that when he came out of the bathroom. He stared at her, and then blinked a few times.

“I...don’t live with my parents anymore,” he said after a while.

“They kicked you out?” she asked incredulously.

“No, I emancipated myself after getting out of the hospital last year.”

“So...where do you live now?”

“In a rented apartment, and I take days off school—”

“—to go to work to pay off your rent,” she finished for him, and he nodded. “You know, if you need help financially or anything, I’m sure I—”

Jet laughed. “You’re sixteen, Tiana. You come from a happy family. I shouldn’t even be telling you things like this in order to maintain your...innocence, if that’s what one would call it. I shouldn’t be weighing you down with my problems. I have no problems supporting myself financially.”

“But you miss out on education,” Tia argued.

He cocked his head to look at her. “Do I look like I’m failing school?” he asked her.

She suddenly remembered that he was the top student in the school. “Right. But still…”

“Tiana, I’m nineteen. I’m an adult.”

“You’re also technically still a teenager, hence the nineteen.”

“Tia, drop it, okay?”

Great. The only time he actually called her Tia was when he was annoyed at her. She turned away and felt a hand on her shoulder.

“I didn’t mean to snap at you,” he said gently. “I just…don’t like talking about this part of my life.”

“I know. I’m going down for breakfast. Do you want me to bring you something?”

He grinned. “As long as your mother isn’t the one who cooked it…”

Tia smirked. “My mother never cooks anything. She’s an expert at heating food up, but she can’t cook to save her life.”

She opened the door to her bedroom and Bingo bounded in unexpectedly, heading straight for Jet’s crotch.

“What are you hiding in there?” Tia asked him as Jet struggled to push Bingo away.

“Do you really want me to answer that question?” Jet asked, smirking.

Tia was a bit startled. “You’re a crude, crude person,” she scolded him mockingly before leaving the room.

6 - Chapter Six

Sarah's jaw dropped when she saw Tia and Jet coming to school together, Jet walking smoothly while Tia limped in on her crutches.

"Oh my God," Sarah said, bouncing excitedly up and down the moment Jet left her and dragging her towards the classroom. "Did he come and pick you up?"

"No."

"Don't tell me you two just happened to bump into each other on the way to school," Carrie warned, who suddenly appeared with Gary. "I'm not buying that shoot."

Damn.

Tia adjusted her sunglasses and shrugged. "It was no big deal. He stayed over last night." And the night before, she wanted to add.

"*What?*" Gary burst out. "He stayed over? Do your parents know?"

"Of course not. What would they think?"

"Exactly what we're thinking right now," he muttered.

She flicked his head. "Nothing happened. We didn't do anything."

"Is that disappointment I sense, dear?" Carrie asked, slinging an arm across her shoulder.

Tia laughed. "Piss off."

"Tell us," Sarah begged her. "What happened?"

"It was nothing," Tia said. "He climbed into my room really drunk on Saturday night—"

"Whoa, wait up," Gary said. "Did you say Saturday night? Did he stay over for two nights?"

Oops. "Uh, no. I meant Sunday night."

Sarah, Carrie and Gary looked at her.

"Fine. He stayed for two nights. What's the big deal about that?"

"Did anything...exciting happen?" Sarah asked. "You know, with him being drunk and all."

If only they knew why he was drunk. “No. Just because he stayed over doesn’t mean that we’ve been...doing inappropriate stuff.”

“I don’t see what’s stopping you,” Carrie said. “You’re sixteen, aren’t you?”

Tia grimaced. “I don’t want to do it yet.”

“Waiting for ‘the one’?” Carrie teased her.

“Please. Besides, it’s not like you’ve done it yourself.”

“Not *yet*.”

Gary grinned. “I’m always available at night Carrie, just in case you didn’t know.”

Carrie elbowed him out of the way. “Seriously, Tia, you should go for Jet. He’s older and judging by his looks, he’s *veree* experienced.” She licked her lips and winked at Tia.

Tia whacked her friend’s arm. “Lay off,” she said, laughing.

“Ooh, someone’s getting defensive,” Carrie teased, and Tia blushed slightly.

“Guys, seriously, there’s nothing going on. We’re just good friends, and he didn’t want his parents finding out that he was drunk, that’s all.”

“Oh, and they won’t mind the fact that he spent two nights over at a girl’s house? A girl who’s by the way, sixteen and vulnerable?” Gary challenged.

“I am not vulnerable,” Tia argued, not wanting to tell them that Jet didn’t live with his parents anymore.

“We’re all more vulnerable than we let on,” Sarah said to her. “You never know.”

Tia nodded, distracted. Jet was outside her classroom. What was he doing here? He was never on this floor. His classroom was two floors above. He caught her eye and beckoned her over.

“I’ll uh, I’ll be right back,” she said, pushing past her friends, ignoring Sarah and Carrie’s giggles and Gary’s whistle.

“What are you doing here?” she asked him, limping up to him. “The bell’s going to ring soon.”

“I know.” He leaned against the doorframe, looking down at her. “I was just wondering whether you wanted to have lunch with me today.”

“We have lunch together whenever you’re at school.”

“No, I meant just the two of us.”

Like a date? “Um, sure. Where are we going?”

He grinned. “I’ll think of a place.” He pushed himself off the doorframe. “I’ll meet you under our tree,” he called over his shoulder as he loped away. Their tree was the one he found her reading under that day. It was their tree now.

Right. So.

He just asked her on a date. Jet just asked her on a date.

Oh my God, Jet Renn just asked her on a date.

“He asked you out on a date, didn’t he?” Carrie asked after seeing the look on her face.

“Well, not technically.”

“Oh, please, you’re practically hyperventilating already.”

“Well, he never said it was going to be date.”

“Okay, we’re doing your makeup at recess. You are *not* allowed to see him during recess today.”

“What? Why?”

“So he wonders where you are. You can’t always be there for him; he’ll get bored of you. It’ll keep him wanting more.”

“Trust me, it works,” Gary said. “Although in my case, she didn’t show up for her *date*.”

Tia laughed as the bell rang.

~

“Come on.” Carrie pulled her impatiently into the bathroom.

“Careful of the leg!”

“Sorry. Sarah!”

“I’m here.” Sarah held up an armful of cosmetics which she had assured her teacher had somehow magically appeared in her locker.

“Guys, it should be—”

Carrie interrupted her. “Subtle but obvious, right? I know, Tia. I go on dates myself, too.”

Tia wished Carrie knew what she was doing because she certainly didn’t know what the hell she was

doing.

Fifteen minutes later...

“Voila!” Carrie said, spinning Tia around so that she could see herself in the mirror.

“Oh my God, Carrie, thank you!” She looked at her watch. “We should go back to our classroom now.”

“Are you kidding?” Carrie asked. “They’d never let you into the classroom with that much makeup on. Besides, Mr. Stanton’s such a perv he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from molesting you. You just sit here prettily like a lady.” She put her hands on her hips. “I still don’t understand why you won’t let me do your eyes.”

Tia readjusted her sunglasses. “I’ll be wearing these anyways so it doesn’t matter.”

“Surely you’re going to take them off when you’re in a restaurant with him.”

Tia shot her a look. “Have you ever seen me without my sunglasses?”

“Good point. But—”

“Here, give me these.” Tia snatched the mascara, the eyeliner and the eye shadow from Carrie. “I’ll do my eyes when you guys are in your lessons okay?”

“Fine.” Satisfied, Carrie turned away. “Let’s go Sarah. Our work here is done.” She blew a kiss towards Tia. “Tell us how it goes, dahling,” she said as the bell rang.

Tia limped up to the mirror and began carefully applying her makeup on.

Not seeing Jet at recess was a good move.

“I missed you at recess today,” he said, pushing himself away from where he was leaning against the tree.

“Yeah, well, I had something to do.”

“I was going to tell you where we were going for lunch at recess but now I guess it’s going to have to be a surprise.”

She grinned. “I love surprises. Well, pleasant ones, anyway.”

They started walking side by side, Jet slowing down when he realised that Tia found it hard to keep up with him with her crutches. He offered to carry her and she declined, saying that she refused to feed his ego because she knew that he was going to say that she couldn’t keep her hands off him. He laughed and said that she knew him too well.

Jet stopped. “We’re here.”

Tia stared in front of her in shock and horror. "Are you serious?"

"Come on."

"No."

"It can't be that bad."

"My parents freaking run the place, Jet, of course it's going to be bad. Come on, you know my mom's cooking. We'll probably get food poisoning after this."

"Tiana, have you eaten in your parents' café?"

"No, isn't it bad enough that I have to eat their food at home?"

"Give them a chance. It's not bad as you think."

"Fine," Tia muttered. "But if I feel even *slightly* nauseous..."

Jet laughed as he helped her up the steps. "I happen to buy my breakfast here every morning."

"No wonder you look weird until after lunch."

"The lunch at school sucks."

"If the lunch at school sucks, then my mother's food positively sucks balls."

He clicked his tongue. "Such crude language. You wouldn't want to swear in your parents' shop, would you?"

"You have no idea how much I wish I had a megaphone with me right now. I'd swear to kingdom come and back."

He led her to a table and pulled her chair open out for her to sit on.

"Hello, Jet." Tia's mother had suddenly appeared. "I didn't know you were coming today." She looked across the table and saw Tia. "Oh, are you taking my daughter on a date, then?"

"Mom!"

Tia's mother ignored her. "That's lovely, Jet. I always thought you two looked cute together."

Jet smiled politely at her. "Thank you, Mrs. Green."

"Charlene, darling, Charlene."

“DAD!” Tia yelled, not caring that there were other customers in the café. “Get your butt over here right now and haul mom out of here.”

Tia’s dad obliged (much to Tia’s relief).

“Is this why you brought me here?” she asked Jet. “To embarrass me?”

“Personally, I find your mother very...endearing.”

Tia snorted. “I bet. I swear, if she wasn’t married, she’d be checking your tonsils out now. And you probably would’ve let her.”

“Now why would I make out with my date’s mother?”

Did he just refer to her as his date? She wanted to jump up and do a little victory dance, but she didn’t want to embarrass herself (again). Besides, the leg was going to make her dance look lame. Well, lamer than it already was. “Ack,” she managed to say, quite lamely.

“There’s something strangely amusing when your date says something of the ‘ack’ calibre.”

She considered ordering a drink to splash onto his face, but that would mean talking to her mother, and she certainly didn’t want to do that for a while. She swallowed.

“I didn’t realise we were on a date,” she said finally.

“Well, what else would you call this?”

She thought about it. “Two friends having lunch, maybe?”

Jet shrugged. “Well, if that’s what you want it to be, then...”

“No!” Tia blurted out. “I mean, I really couldn’t care less.”

He smirked. “Oh?”

“Mm.”

“Would you lovebirds like to order now?” Tia’s mother had once again magically appeared out of nowhere. Tia was grateful that she had appeared so she and Jet wouldn’t have to continue the conversation. She was however, not grateful that her mother had just called them lovebirds.

Jet opened his menu for the first time since they had come into the café. “What’s the most popular dish in this café, Mrs. Green?”

“Well, our food is in general quite good, so there isn’t a particular dish—”

“Oh, well, can you choose one for me that you think I’ll like?” Jet winked at Tia’s mother before

handing her the menu.

Tia rolled her eyes. "I'll uh, have whatever he's having."

Her mother took their menus, squeezed Tia's shoulders and whispered to her that Jet was such a nice and pleasant boy before disappearing off into the kitchen. Tia blinked several times and sipped at her Coke.

"Well, Tiana, have you decided?"

"Decided what?"

"Whether this is going to be a date or just two friends having lunch."

Tia felt the heat creep up into her cheeks. "I don't...I don't think I can be the judge of that until this...date, well, lunch date, is really over."

Jet grinned. "Ah, so you'd expect me to do something more for it to be called a date, but right now, it's a bit more than just two friends having lunch?"

She stuck out her chin. "That's right." Her fingers were drumming nervously on the table while his was placed calmly there, about an inch away from hers. He had nice hands: long and artistic fingers.

"So what would you expect me to do if this were to be a date, Tia?"

He had called her Tia again. She didn't know whether to smack the silly grin she knew she had off her face right now or to simply shriek with joy.

"Um," she started, trying to think of something that wouldn't give too much away, "what would you usually do on a date?"

"Well, for starters, there would be some kind of contact," he said, stretching out his fingers and touching Tia's hand. Electricity jolted through where he was touching her, but she didn't pull away.

"Yeah," she breathed. "Contact is good. Definitely."

He grinned. "I thought you'd like it."

"I do."

Just then, Tia's mother appeared (surprise, surprise). "Here's your lunch, dears. Oh my," she said, taking in their hands, which were now clasped, "am I interrupting anything?"

Tia felt like taking the knife that was on her table and stabbing her mother with it. "Um, no. Thanks mom."

Her mother placed their lunches in front of them. "Just call me if you need me," she said, smiling down

at Jet.

Jet smiled politely back at her. "Thank you, Mrs. Green."

Tia groaned. "I think you should have a restraining order against my mother," she said after her mother had left.

"Your mother's very nice, and she's overprotective of you. She's a good mother. Unlike mine."

Tia squeezed his hand gently. "You can have my mother whenever you want."

Jet laughed. "Your mother is very caring, Tiana. You just need a little more patience."

"I need a truckload of patience when it comes to my mother."

"She does what she thinks is best for you."

"You mean constantly embarrassing me while trying to flirt with you?"

Jet grinned. "Except for that."

They started eating, talking about whatever came to mind. Tia realised that the food really wasn't that bad. But that was probably because it was her dad who cooked the food. Still, she had to give the food some kind of credit.

"Shall we go?" Jet asked after paying the bill. Their mother had refused to let him pay, but Jet had insisted. They got up to leave.

"What time is it?" Tia asked.

"Three."

Tia nodded, and then she whipped her head around suddenly. "It's *three*?"

"Yes."

"But lunch ends at two thirty!"

"I know."

"But...but...we're late!"

"I know."

"But...why are you so calm about this?"

Jet shrugged, grinning and obviously enjoying the frantic look on her face. "Why are you so worried?"

“Because it’s school! And we’re late! And I have Maths now! And unlike some people, I can’t do Maths to save my life and need all the help I can get!”

Jet waved away her excuses. “I can help you with Maths.”

“Don’t you have to go work?” she asked him as they walked out of the café.

He shrugged. “One day off won’t kill me.”

“No,” she said sternly. “You’ve skipped school because of me already. You are not skipping work because of me.”

“Tiana—”

“No. Don’t even try to persuade me by batting those blue eyes at me. It ain’t gonna work. You are going to work. Now.”

“Can’t I at least explain to your parents why you’re late for school?”

“Oh crap.” Tia groaned. “They’re going to know about it, aren’t they?”

“I’m sure they’ll let me explain.” Jet grinned down at her. “Wait here.” He went back into the café and began striking up a conversation with Tia’s mother.

From outside, it looked a bit more like banter and flirtation to Tia, but as long as it was going to get her out of trouble, then her mother could flirt as long as she wanted with Jet. Even though the idea of her mother flirting with Jet wasn’t exactly an image she wanted to picture in her head.

Jet came out five minutes later. “All settled.”

“Really?”

“Really. Now all I have to do is walk you back home before I go to work.”

“I know my way home, Jet.”

“I know, but I want to walk you home. Besides, my shift doesn’t start for another half hour.” He casually slipped his hand in hers as they walked along.

Heat spread from Tia’s hand to the rest of her body. She hoped fervently that she wasn’t blushing. It was suddenly too hot. She could feel herself burning up. She gave an involuntary shiver.

“Are you cold?” he asked her.

Was he serious? Cold was the last thing she was feeling right now. “No. I’m fine.”

“But you were shivering.”

“Um...it was just a little...random spasm.”

Jet raised an eyebrow but didn't push it any further.

~

“Here you are, Miss.” Jet bowed as they reached Tia's home.

Tia rolled her eyes as she walked up the driveway. Jet followed her up.

“Uh, so, have fun at work,” she said—quite lamely, she might add.

He grinned. “I'll try. Have fun at home while the others are cracking their heads against the wall while trying to do Maths.”

She grinned back. “Oh, I will.”

They stood there in front of the front door, Tia nervous and Jet slightly uncomfortable.

“Right,” Tia said after a while. “I suppose I should go in now.”

“Yeah. I'll see you around.”

“You're not coming to school tomorrow?”

He shrugged. “Work.”

“Right. Well, bye.” She opened the door and was just about to go in when she felt a hand on her arm.

She turned around just as Jet closed in and kissed her swiftly on the cheek. To think the number of times he must've done this to perfect the timing.

“I hope you enjoyed our date as much as I did,” he said. “Albeit the fact that your mother wouldn't leave us alone.”

She smiled. “Yeah, I did. Albeit the fact that my mom wouldn't leave us alone.”

He smiled again, and his gaze dropped down to her lips. He licked his lips, as if wondering whether he should kiss her. Please do, Tia begged silently. But he didn't. He looked away. “I should go.”

“Right. I'll see you.”

He nodded and walked away from her.

7 - Chapter Seven

Jet didn't go to school, which again strangely disappointed Tia even though he had already told her that he wasn't going to be there.

You're going to have to prepare yourself for a lot of disappointment if you're going to fall in love with Jet Renn, she scolded herself. The first one being him being three years older than her and could screw around with anybody he wanted because of his sexy good looks. And his looks weren't the only thing that was sexy, either.

Oh God, did she just admit that she was in love with him?

She didn't. She couldn't possibly. They've only known each other for like a month or two.

She shook her head and tried to concentrate on her lesson. Ms. Cutler was blabbering on about something to do with Shakespeare and Tia just wasn't interested.

The rest of the day passed impossibly slowly.

"I thought school would never end," Tia said, sighing in relief when the final bell rang.

"That's what I think every single day," Gary muttered.

"Where's Jet today?" Sarah asked.

Tia shrugged. "Skipping school again, I guess."

"He doesn't come to school often, does he?"

"I don't know. I don't exactly notice."

"Yeah right," Carrie scoffed. "You look sad and depressed every time Jet isn't at school, and when he is you light up brighter than a light bulb."

"Don't be ridiculous, Carrie." Her sunglasses were sliding down. She adjusted her sunglasses so that Carrie wouldn't be able to see her eyes.

"I'm never ridiculous."

"That's debatable," Gary chimed in.

"Shut up, you."

~

“You’re at school,” Tia said to Jet at recess when she saw him waiting for her under their tree.

“I haven’t been here much lately, have I?”

“Not really.”

Jet sighed. “I have to work extra shifts now.”

“Why? Has your rent gone up?”

“No, I just realised I’m going to need a lot of money for college.” Jet grimaced. “I don’t think I can afford to go to college, actually.”

“What if you didn’t need to pay your rent?” Tia asked him. “Would you have enough money to pay for college then?”

“Probably. But it’s not like my landlord would suddenly come up to me and say ‘hey, Jet, why don’t you live here for free? I don’t mind at all.’ My landlord’s a dog.”

“All landlords are doges. Besides, I know a place where you can live for free.”

“Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“Where?”

“Well...this is going to sound weird, but...my house. We have a guestroom, and you know my mom—and my dad, and Bingo—loves you.”

“Tiana, I can’t—”

“Come on. Think about it.”

“I am, believe me, I am. I’m thinking how unbelievably wrong it would be.”

“Look. You need somewhere to stay. Besides, you stay in my room almost every night anyway.”

“It isn’t fair for me to just suddenly move in.”

“You can help out at the café in the evenings instead of paying rent. If it makes you feel better.”

“I don’t know...what do your parents make of this?”

“I have no idea. But I’m sure they’ll be thrilled. You’re like a son to them. I’ll go ask them tonight. I’ll say that your parents are going to be out of town for a while and you need a place to stay.”

“That’s the lamest excuse I’ve ever heard.”

“Oh, shut up. My mom’s gullible, and she’s even more gullible when it comes to you.”

“Tiana, I don’t know about this.”

“Well, I do. I’ll go ask my parents tonight.”

Jet’s hair fell into his eyes as he looked down at her. “Thank you,” he said finally.

“You should thank me,” she said before turning away and heading back towards the classroom.

~

“Hey, mom,” Tia said, walking into her mother’s bedroom. “I want to ask you something.”

“What is it, honey?”

“Um, you know how we have that guestroom that we never use?”

“Honey, I’m not going to turn it into a games room. Or a walk-in wardrobe. Or an en suite sauna. How many times have we gone over this?”

“I was wondering, how about we turn it into Jet’s bedroom instead?”

“No,” her mother replied automatically. Then she frowned when she realised what her daughter had said. “What?”

“Jet’s parents are going out of town for...quite a while and he needs a place to stay. He’s willing to help out at the café every few nights to pay us back.”

“Tia.”

“Please, mom. You like Jet, don’t you? He’s nice, and he’s kind, and he’s decent, as you’ve said about a million times.”

“But Tia, this is a bit...”

“A bit what?”

“How old is he?”

“Nineteen.”

“And you’re sixteen. Surely...”

“Surely what?” Tia was getting impatient.

“Well, if anything goes on, then...” her mother trailed off. “On the other hand, the walls here are so thin I’d be able to hear everything and come in to stop you just before it gets a bit—”

“Mom, that’s not going to be a problem,” Tia said flatly.

“Oh? And why is that?”

Tia considered saying that Jet was gay. “Um, he has a girlfriend.”

“Oh. Okay. That’s too bad, isn’t it? You’re very fond of Jet.”

So are you, Tia thought sarcastically. “So, can Jet stay here?”

“I suppose. And tell him that he doesn’t need to pay us back. We’d be happy to have him here.”

“I’ll go call Jet now,” she called, rushing out of her mother’s room.

She went into her room. “Jet, my mom said yes.”

He stood up from where he was sitting in the armchair. “Seriously?”

“Seriously. Now climb out my bedroom window, go to your place, pack then come back.”

“Maybe I should do all this tomorrow. It’s a bit too...soon.”

“Don’t worry, just say that your parents changed their flight or something.”

“Not tonight.”

“Why not?”

“Well, I’m here already, aren’t I? I’ll just spend the night in your room like I usually do.”

“No, you usually leave at one in the morning to go back to your place.”

“Well, this is going to be exactly the same, except for the fact that I’m not going to go back to my place. I really can’t be bothered to go all the way to my place.”

“Tomorrow, then.”

He nodded. “Tomorrow.”

8 - Chapter Eight

Jet moved in after school the next day. Tia's mother was delighted. She had cleaned out the room, made the bed, aired the room out and all that shoot.

"Hello, Jet, dear, so nice to have you staying with us," she gushed as she opened the door to let Jet in.

"Thank you so much for having me," Jet said, ever the gentleman. Tia wanted to puke.

"Oh, it's no trouble at all."

~

"Well, kids, dad and I are going out for dinner tonight with a couple of friends. Now Jet, you'll take care of Tia, won't you?"

"Of course, Mrs. Green."

"Really, Jet, you must call me Charlene. Mrs. Green makes me feel old."

"Uh, right. Okay, Charlene."

Tia sat down on the stairs and buried her head into her hands.

"Now, Tia, bedtime is at eleven thirty as usual."

"Mom, I don't have a curfew."

"That was before you fell down into that well," her mother said, sniffing.

Tia made a face. "Fine."

"Jet, make sure she gets to bed at that time, okay?"

"Yes, Mrs.—I mean, Charlene."

"Dinner's in the fridge. Thirty minutes in the microwave will heat it right up."

"Yes, I know, mom. Have fun."

"You too dear, although not too much fun, if you know what I mean." Her mother winked—not very subtly—at her and Tia grew bright red.

"Mom!"

“See you, dears.”

“That,” Tia muttered once her parents had left, “was just plain embarrassing.”

“That,” Jet said cheerfully, “was just plain amusing.”

“Oh, shut up.”

~

“It’s eleven thirty,” Jet said, leaning against the doorframe of Tia’s room. “You should be in bed.”

Tia snorted. “Oh, please. I don’t remember you telling me to be in bed when we’ve been staying up talking till one in the morning for the past month.”

Jet clicked his tongue. “Ah, but your mother gave me specific orders tonight to see that you’re in bed by eleven thirty. I wouldn’t want to disappoint her. Now get into bed.”

“No.”

“Tiana.”

“Jethro.”

Jet half frowned, half laughed. “My name’s not Jethro.”

“Dammit. Isn’t Jet short for something?”

“No. It’s just Jet.”

“Dammit. Your name’s boring.”

“Thanks.”

“Anytime.”

“Will you get into bed if I told you a bedtime story?”

“Would you really?”

“No.”

“Then no.”

Jet strode into her room towards her.

“Hey, you don’t have permission to be in my room,” she protested. “Hey, you don’t have permission to pick me up either. Put me down. Now.”

He ignored her protests and dumped her—quite unceremoniously—onto the bed.

“Ow,” she complained, climbing in between the sheets.

“Sorry,” he said, sounding anything but. “Well, goodnight.”

“No!” She dragged him down so that he was sitting on the bed next to her. “You have to tell me a bedtime story.”

“What are you, six?”

“Six and a half, to be precise. Now tell me that damn bedtime story.”

Jet sighed. “Once upon a time, there was a princess called Tia. She never wanted to go to bed. So Prince Jet, young, handsome, brave and perfect as he was, would go and tell her to go to bed. And since Princess Tia and Prince Jet were such good friends, Princess Tia always listened to what Prince Jet said. And so, Princess Tia would go to bed like any nice six and a half year old girl would. And she slept happily ever after. The end.”

Tia looked at Jet for a while. “That was crap,” she said finally.

Jet laughed.

“How is that a bedtime story? There was no kiss at the ending of the story!”

“Not all bedtime stories have a kiss at the ending.”

“Mine always did.”

“Very well, then,” Jet said as Bingo bounded into the room and jumped onto the bed to lick Tia. “Before Princess Tia fell asleep, Bingo, her dog came and licked her face goodnight. The end.”

“You’re a horrible storyteller.”

“What, aren’t there enough kisses?”

“No.”

“Very well. The next morning, Bingo came to lick her good morning. And also to lick her good afternoon. And to lick her good evening. And—”

“Stop now.”

“If you insist.”

“Those were licks. Not kisses.”

“Very well. How’s this? The king and queen come back to kiss the princess goodnight.”

“But they’re too busy making out with each other.”

Jet grinned. “Fine then. I suppose there’s only Prince Jet left.”

“I suppose there is.”

“So Jet kisses Tia goodnight.”

“That’s right.”

Jet’s smile faded as he became more serious and his gaze dropped down to Tia’s lips. She could feel her heart speed up, going at about two hundred miles an hour.

“Well?” she asked boldly, sitting up on her bed. “Isn’t he going to kiss her goodnight?”

“I suppose he should,” he murmured. And so he did.

It was meant to be quick, brief but also sweet at the same time. When Tia sensed that he was about to pull away, she slid her arms around his neck and slid down so that she was lying down again, bringing Jet with her. She felt Jet’s gasp of surprise when she suddenly dragged him down, but he made no move to resist, either.

After a while, he pulled away gently.

“Tiana,” he said, sitting on the edge of her bed again, “that was hardly necessary.” He bit his lip. “I shouldn’t have done that,” he said after a while. “It was wrong.”

Wrong? Was it wrong? Did it feel wrong to him? She didn’t answer him from where she was still lying down on her bed. She looked up at him, his inky black hair, and those mesmerising yet sharp blue eyes. He lifted his hand to stroke her cheek once, and then he stood up.

“I should go,” he said reluctantly after a while. “Your parents will be home soon.”

Just as Jet was about to leave the room, they heard Charlene run up the stairs.

“Well, Jet?” Tia’s mother asked him, coming into Tia’s room. “Were you able to put Tia to bed?”

Jet grinned. “It took a lot of hard work, but I finally did it.”

“Good, good. Tia, I hope you didn’t give Jet a hard time.”

“Mom, he’s my friend, not my babysitter.”

Her mother clicked her tongue and told Jet that she wasn't always this rude. Jet smiled politely at her left after wishing them both a good night.

"Jet's a good boy," Tia's mother said, sitting down on the edge of Tia's bed.

Tia raised her eyebrow. "Yes, I know."

"You *are* dating him, aren't you?"

Tia faltered. "Not really. I don't know."

"How can you now know whether you're dating a boy?"

Tia shrugged. "I think we're more than just friends, but if we're dating, then it's going to be a casual thing, y'know?"

There were times that Tia and her mother could be close (but most of the time, she just found her mother annoying).

"Why?" her mother pressed on.

Tia shrugged again. "I don't know. I mean, mom, he's three years older than me. Nothing can possibly happen. He could be screwing around with some random girl and I wouldn't know about it."

Her mother clicked her tongue at the word screwing. "Jet seems like a nice boy. If he genuinely likes you he wouldn't be... 'screwing around with some random girl'."

"That's the thing, mom. I don't know whether he genuinely likes me."

"And do you like him?"

Tia shrugged. "I guess so."

Her mother tousled her hair. "He'll come around. The smart ones always do." She kissed the top of her head and left.

~

Tia was about to fall asleep when she heard a soft knock on her door. Jet peered in a second or so later.

"Tiana?"

Tia's eyes flew open at the sound of Jet's voice. "Jet." She sat up on her bed. "What are you doing here?"

He shushed her. "Not too loud. Your parents are still awake. I came here to...apologise."

“For what?”

“For saying that what I did was wrong. I still think I shouldn’t have done it, but it definitely wasn’t...wrong.”

Tia wanted to ask him whether it felt right, but she didn’t. “Okay.”

“So...I apologise for that.”

“Okay.”

“Right then. Goodnight.”

Tia watched Jet as he left her room. Just when he was about to close the door, she called his name.

“Yes?”

“Do you really think that you shouldn’t have done it?”

“Very much so.” He closed the door behind him.

Dammit.

9 - Chapter Nine

It was, needless to say, very awkward at breakfast the next morning.

“Good morning, Mr. Green and...Charlene.”

Tia’s dad grunted his good morning and Charlene gushed hers.

Jet paused. “Good morning, Tia.”

“Morning”, she mumbled.

“There are croissants and pancakes, Jet,” Tia’s mother said. “Help yourself to some.”

“I’m...really not that hungry, Mrs. Green.”

“But you come to our café every morning, dear.”

“I must’ve lost my appetite some time during the night. Can I just have a coffee, please?”

“Sam, pour Jet some coffee.”

Tia’s dad muttered something about being a slave (yes, again) but obliged.

“Thank you, Mr. Green.” Jet downed his coffee. “I’ll...I’ll see you at school, Tia.”

“Mm.” As Jet walked past her, Tia grabbed the sleeve of his shirt. “I thought you worked on Thursdays,” she whispered.

“I do,” he replied.

“So I’m not actually going to see you at school today.”

“No.”

“Right. Okay.”

Jet bit his lip. “I’ll see you later.” He waited until Tia’s parents weren’t looking and stroked her cheek once again with his long fingers before disappearing out the front door.

Tia sighed. This was going to be a long day.

~

“Well someone’s looking all depressed and miserable,” Carrie remarked.

“Thanks, it’s good to see you too.” Tia plopped herself down in her chair.

“What’s wrong?” Sarah asked. “Is Jet not at school again today?”

“Nope.” She hadn’t told them about Jet moving in yet. She was debating on whether she should tell Sarah. Not Carrie or Gary, because Carrie would make some sarcastic and snarky comment and she had a feeling that Gary would be jealous.

“Where does he go anyway?” Gary asked, curious.

Tia shrugged. “Don’t ask me.”

“Well we can’t exactly ask him now, can we?”

“Yes, you can. I don’t know every single thing that’s going on in his life, okay?”

“Note to self: do not irritate Tia Green today unless feeling suicidal.” Gary sat back in his chair, writing down what he said in big capital letters on a piece of paper.

Tia picked up whatever was nearest to her and threw it at Gary. He dodged and the wad of paper sailed past him and hit Cheryl Bailiff on the shoulder.

Cheryl whipped around and glared. “Who threw that?” she asked, her eyes flashing.

Tia grimaced. This was a bad day. Cheryl dogliff was on the loose. “Sorry. It was supposed to be for Gary.”

“But it didn’t hit *Gary*, did it? It hit *me*.”

“Yes. Sorry.”

Cheryl stared down at where Tia was sitting with contempt. Tia knew the dark sunglasses she was wearing put Cheryl off a little, and she felt a bit safer.

“Do that again next time and I’ll make your life a living hell,” Cheryl hissed before turning around and stalking away.

Gary gave a low whistle. “dogliff’s in a bad mood today.”

“No!” Carrie drawled sarcastically. “Really?”

“She’s hit a new low,” Tia observed as Cheryl stormed past a poor boy in Year Eight and knocked all his books down into the pond.

“And that is why the pond is dangerous and should be removed,” Carrie said, sniffing.

Gary laughed. "The only reason you don't like that pond is because you accidentally tripped and fell into it last year."

Carrie glared at him and he shut up immediately.

At recess, Tia dragged Sarah off into the toilet and told her about Jet staying at her place. Sarah shrieked and jumped up and down like the bubbly excited airhead she was.

Tia shushed her. "Shut up, otherwise everyone will know."

"That's so great!" Sarah whispered excitedly. "You're living with Jet Renn."

"I have something else to tell you, but you have to promise not to tell anyone and you have to promise not to scream."

"What is it? What is it?"

"Jet kissed me last night."

Sarah gasped.

"Then he said it was wrong and that he shouldn't have done it."

Sarah ignored the latter comment. "He kissed you?" She opened her mouth to scream, but then remembered that she wasn't allowed so she started hyperventilating.

"Calm down, Sarah," Tia said drily. "It's me he kissed."

"It's you who kissed?" Carrie demanded, walking into the bathroom.

Tia and Sarah exchanged a look.

"Gary," they said simultaneously. Huh, talk about in sync.

"He *what?*"

"You heard us," Tia said.

"Gary kissed you? When?"

"Uh, yesterday after school."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Carrie demanded.

"Because...well..." Tia trailed off.

“Because we thought you had a crush on him,” Sarah blurted out.

Carrie frowned. “Are you serious?”

Sarah and Tia both nodded. It was true; they had suspected that Carrie had a crush on Gary. They also suspected that Gary had a crush on Tia.

“Well?” Tia asked after a while. “Do you like him?”

“No. Not really.” Carrie went and sat down next to them.

“Not really? So yes?”

“No, just not really.”

“But it’s not a no.”

“No, it’s not.”

“So you do like him, just not enough to admit it?”

“Something like that.”

Sarah patted her back. “Well I’m sure he likes you too,” she said, sharing another look with Tia.

“Yeah, whatever. I don’t actually care.” Carrie stood up. “You want to go? Recess is almost over.”

~

At lunch, Tia was going out with Carrie, Sarah and Gary. They had just stepped out of the school building when they almost walked into Jet.

“Hi.”

Tia blinked a few times. “What are you doing here?”

He shrugged. “It’s a school day, isn’t it?”

“But...okay.”

“Can I have lunch with you?”

Tia licked her lips. “Well, I kind of promised my friends that I’d have lunch with them...”

“Then can I join you guys?”

“Uh, sure. If my friends don’t mind, then—”

“We don’t mind,” Carrie and Sarah trilled from where they were behind her. Next to them, Gary was trying to keep the scowl off his face.

Jet grinned. “Well, it’s settled then.”

“Shouldn’t you be at work?” Tia whispered to him on the way to the restaurant.

“My next shift starts at three.”

~

It was a mix of awkwardness and discomfort over lunch. The only ones who didn’t seem to notice were Carrie and Sarah, who were flirting with Jet. Jet smiled politely and answered their questions, but couldn’t take his eyes off Tia, which made her blush. Gary was glaring at Jet, and stiffened every time Jet came anywhere within a foot of Tia. Tia was trying to ignore the flirting, the eyeing, the glaring and the stiffening.

She sipped at her water and when the waitress came to take their order, Tia simply handed her menu over to the waitress and said “I’ll have whatever Jet’s having.” This of course, pissed Gary off to no end while it made Jet’s day.

He smiled from where he was sitting next to Tia and moved his hand so that theirs were just touching. Nobody else noticed—except for Gary, who was now so stiff that Tia was surprised he didn’t break in half.

She heated up considerably when Jet shifted his hand and twined his fingers with hers. The warmth from Jet’s hand spread to her left hand and up to her cheeks.

“Is it too hot in here, Tia?” Sarah asked from across the table. “You look a bit flushed. Maybe you should take your jacket off.”

Carrie nudged her—very unobtrusively. “Drop it,” she said, *sotto voce*. “They’ve got a bit of action going on. But I suppose you should take your jacket off for that as well,” she added in her normal voice.

Tia flushed bright red. “Guys, shut up.”

Halfway through their meal, Jet let go of Tia’s hand and stood up, saying that he remembered he had something to do and that he was sorry that he had to leave so early. Sarah and Carrie giggled and accepted his apology gracefully. Gary muttered something along the lines of “Thank God, finally”. Tia didn’t say anything.

As Jet walked past her on the way out, he mouthed to her that he’d see her later on tonight.

~

Jet obviously had a long shift, so when Tia's mother asked her where he was, Tia simply shrugged and said that he was out with his friends.

"I hope he doesn't come back drunk," Tia's mother said, worried. "It would be a bad influence on you."

Tia rolled her eyes. "Please, mom, you know I don't drink. Not since I...fell into the well."

"Is that why you don't go out anymore, honey? There aren't that many wells to fall into out there."

"No. I just...don't feel like going out anymore," she said, not wanting to tell her mom that there was no need to go out at night when Jet would come and visit her. Especially now that he lived here.

"Maybe you should get Jet to take you out some time."

"Uh, yeah, I'll ask him about it," she said, having no intention whatsoever to ask him about it. Ever.

The doorbell rang then, and her mother rushed to answer the door. Tia looked down at her watch. It was ten thirty. Yep, that was Jet off work all right. She rushed up the stairs and into her room. She opened up her Maths homework (it was the only piece of homework she hadn't finished yet...she had no idea how to do it) and stared at it, trying to make sense of the numbers and the symbols and wondering how the hell they were supposed to form a particular number.

She sighed and then randomly wrote down some numbers. She was bound to get at least one right. Right? She left the book open, not bothering to even close it and went to go take a shower.

When Jet came into her room later that night, she pretended to be asleep. He sat down on the side of her bed, watching her as if he knew she was pretending and was trying to catch her out. She kept her eyes closed and her breathing steady. After a while, she felt another soft stroke on her cheek before feeling him get up off the bed and heard him starting to walk out the room. There was a slight pause, a little scuffling before the footsteps resumed, and at last, the door closed.

~

Tia woke up to her alarm clock ringing loudly in her ear on her bedside table. Without even looking, she slammed the alarm clock down again and again until it stopped ringing. She lifted her head from the pillow and looked at the clock. She came to the conclusion that she may have broken the clock.

Oh well.

She stumbled out of bed and into the bathroom that was on the landing to brush her teeth. It was locked. What the hell?

She banged on the door. "Dad, is it you?" she yelled. "Get your butt out of there right now! Dad!"

The door opened.

“Geez,” Tia muttered, looking up. “What took you sooooooh...ah.”

It was Jet. A towel around his waist—and nothing else. With water dripping from his hair onto his body, which was, Tia did not fail to notice, great. She dragged her gaze reluctantly away from him.

“Uh.” She pushed past him, into the bathroom, closed the door and locked it. She was suddenly feeling hungry. She wanted breakfast. Preferably pancakes. And maple syrup. And maybe with Jet on the side.

Mmmmm.

She pushed the thoughts away and started brushing her teeth vigorously. For a long, long time. When she got out, everybody was already at the breakfast table and had almost finished breakfast.

“You certainly took your time this morning, dear,” her mother said.

“Sorry.”

Jet finished off his coffee and stood up. “I’m going to head off to school now,” he announced.

“Have a nice day, dear,” Tia’s mother said.

“I will. Thank you, uh, Charlene.”

“Wait, Jet, why don’t you take Tia with you so that she doesn’t have to go alone?”

“Mom, I’m going to take ages,” Tia protested. “Jet can leave first.”

“No, it’s okay,” Jet said, sitting down again. “I can wait.”

Tia bit her lip, frustrated. “Mom, tell Jet that he can leave first.”

“Tia, he’s right in front of you. Surely you can tell him yourself.”

Tia looked away.

After breakfast, Tia went upstairs to pack her bag for school. She was about to dump her Maths book—still open from last night—into her bag.

Whoa, wait a minute. She grabbed the book and flipped it to the right page. Those weren’t the random numbers she scribbled in. That was not her handwriting.

Then she realised. Jet had stopped on his way out of her room last night to look at her Maths homework and found out that she’d been filling in random numbers and had taken it into his room and redone it.

Very sweet. But still, that kiss was wrong for him. And he still thought that he shouldn’t have done it. So no go.

“Bye, mom, bye, dad,” she called out as she went out the front door.

“Bye, Tia,” her mother called. “Bye, Jet.”

“Goodbye, Mrs. Green. Charlene.” Jet followed Tia out of the house.

As soon as the front door had closed, Jet grabbed Tia’s arm.

She whipped around to find his lips on hers, kissing her roughly.

Whoa-whee (that, by the way, means that it’s a surprise but it’s also a very good and exciting surprise).

“Wha—”

“You’ve been ignoring me,” he said, pulling abruptly away from her.

“No,” she breathed, wondering whether she should pull him back and kiss him. “I haven’t.”

“You haven’t been talking to me.”

She decided against it. He was kind of pissing her off now. “Yes I have,” she argued. “I talked to you at lunch yesterday.”

“Only when I talked to you first.”

“How is that a problem?”

“You pretended to be asleep last night to avoid talking to me!”

“Well, I didn’t know there was something you wanted to talk to me about.”

“Well, there was.”

“What is it?”

He let go of her arm then, looking down and kicking his shoes against the ground. “I...I just wanted to say that...what I did...I still think I shouldn’t have done it, but I can’t stop thinking about it, either.”

Right. Well. Okay. “Um.”

“I wanted to do it, even though I shouldn’t have.” He looked up, his blue eyes piercing through her. “Do you understand what I mean?”

“Um. Yes.” Not really.

He licked his lips nervously. “I...” he trailed off, not knowing what to say. “I’m never at loss for words. Never. But with you, I...I always am.”

“Right. Okay.”

He ran his hand through his hair, frustrated now. “Can’t you give me something more constructive?”

“Um...”

“That’s not very constructive.”

“God, give me time to think,” she snapped.

“You’re not supposed to have to think,” he snapped back.

“Then what the hell am I supposed to do?”

He threw his hands up in frustration. “This!” He grabbed her again and kissed her.

Whoa-whee. Again. His lips softened and Tia’s knees buckled beneath her, but that didn’t matter, because Jet was holding her up.

When he finally let go, she took a step back, dazed. “Oh. Right. That would be...very constructive, wouldn’t it?”

“Very,” he agreed.

Tia looked down at her watch. “I would do that very constructive thing that you had in mind, but we’re going to be late for school.”

“So?”

“I don’t like being late for school. Just because you don’t go to school half the time doesn’t give you an excuse to be late.”

“You’re going to have to do that constructive thing I had in mind later,” he called after her.

10 - Chapter Ten

“Tiana Green, you are three minutes late!” Ms. Cutler barked.

“Sorry, Ms.” Tia slid into her seat.

“You’re late?” Carrie whispered to her. “You’re never late.”

“Well, I am now.”

“You were with Jet, weren’t you?” Carrie accused her.

“What? No!”

“Liar.”

“Fine. I was. So what?”

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

“Don’t give me that shoot.”

“Well, he did my Maths homework for me.”

“Oh, very exciting,” Carrie said, rolling her eyes. “You tell me what happened between you and Jet right now.”

“Nothing!”

“If it was nothing, then you wouldn’t be late for school.”

“Carrie, stop being so damn intuitive.”

“Miss Green!” Ms. Cutler barked. “You’re seeing me after class.”

“Yes, Ms,” Tia said, glaring at her Carrie, who smiled sweetly back at her.

~

“You’re out late,” Jet mused, leaning against their tree.

“I had to stay behind to talk to the teacher.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Carrie got me into trouble, that’s all.”

“Well?”

“Well what?”

“It’s time for you to do that constructive thing that I had in mind.”

“What? Here? Now?”

“You heard me, yes, and yes.”

“Stop taking my questions so literally,” she muttered.

“Go on then.”

“Not here!”

“Yes here.”

“Why here?”

“Why not?”

“Because the whole school is out here!”

“So?”

“So they’ll see!”

He looked at her. “So?”

She stamped her foot. “I am not going to kiss you in front of the whole school,” she said in a low voice so that nobody else could hear. “It’s hard enough to do it when we’re alone in the first place.”

He smirked. “What’s so hard? All you had to do was stop controlling your urges.”

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever.”

“Go on then. I’m waiting.”

“No.”

“You promised.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Fine, you didn’t. But you still have to.”

“Why?”

He grinned. “Because you know you want to.” He raised an eyebrow, his blue eyes sparkling mischievously.

She looked at him balefully, not saying anything because she knew he was right, and that he knew that she knew that he was right.

“Fine,” she muttered. She stomped over to where he was standing. She had to stand on one of the tree roots and on tiptoe so that she was tall enough.

He stood there, grinning. “Oh, and you have to take off your shades.”

She pursed her lips impatiently, ripped off her sunglasses and handed them to him before slipping her arms around his neck. She reached up hesitantly and kissed him. When her lips met his, heat shot through her, and it was like fireworks were going off inside her. She pulled him closer to her, the magical sensation taking over her and making her forget everything else.

He obviously felt the same way, because he was very responsive. Her weight was once again supported by him as her legs had once again failed to hold her up. She barely noticed the calls and the whistles from the people who were passing by.

After what seemed like forever, she reluctantly pulled away—she didn’t know why, she sure as hell didn’t want to, but she did anyway.

He had an arm around her waist that was drawing her against him and a hand up in her hair. When he sensed that she was pulling away, he loosened his grip on her a little.

“Well,” he said finally. “That was very constructive.”

“Yes,” she agreed breathlessly, grinning. “Definitely.”

“You should get back into class now. You don’t want to be late, do you?”

Dammit, she couldn’t keep the smile off her face. “No, I don’t.” She stepped off the tree root, her legs still feeling like jelly. She took her sunglasses from him and put them back on before turning around to her friends.

“Nothing going on between you and Jet, eh?” Carrie asked on their way back to the classroom.

“You saw?”

Carrie snorted. "Oh, please. Everybody saw. You two weren't exactly hiding in a broom closet."

Tia blushed and looked around. "Where's Gary?" she asked Sarah in a low voice.

"Off sulking somewhere," Sarah whispered in her ear.

"Ah. I suppose we should go back to the classroom now. I don't want to be late again. Ms. Cutler's going to bite my head off."

When they got back, Gary was sulking at the corner of the classroom.

"Hey," she greeted him.

"Hi," he mumbled.

"Where were you at recess?" she asked him.

"Here."

"Oh? Why?"

"I saw something outside that made me feel a little nauseous," he muttered.

Right. "Oh."

Just then Mr. Linkman walked into their classroom. "Ms. Cutler had an emergency to tend to, so you're going to spend the next hour in silence doing some studying, okay?"

Everybody nodded, already taking out their phones, iPods, laptops and videogames.

Mr. Linkman nodded approvingly at them and walked out of the classroom again, and Carrie snorted and shook her head.

"The dude's delusional," she said, taking out her book.

Tia grinned in agreement before taking out a piece of paper and doodling. Something was bothering her. It made her uncomfortable. After a while, the discomfort grew and she shook her head as if trying to shake away the feeling, but it didn't go away. She frowned and looked around and froze when she saw that Sherman was looking at her.

She pursed her lips and looked away, but out of the corner of her eye she saw that he was still looking at her. She looked back at him again, hardening her gaze. It didn't matter whether she was wearing her sunglasses or not. People always knew a glare when it was directed at them. Sherman looked away then.

Good. She had found that slightly disturbing. As she continued to doodle aimlessly on her piece of paper, she saw that not only Sherman would sneak a look at her occasionally but Gary would too.

What was wrong with the world? Gary was supposed to be with Carrie. They were so perfect for each other that even their names rhymed. She stood up abruptly and headed for the bathroom so that she could daydream in peace and relive the memory of the kiss she shared with Jet.

~

Jet had work that night. Tia was disappointed but shrugged the feeling off. She phoned Sarah and Carrie up and asked them whether they wanted to go out since it was Friday night and they didn't have school the next day.

Sarah declined, saying that her parents were dragging her to some far off place to go camping. Tia laughed and wished her good luck. Sarah thanked her and said that she was going to need it.

"So," Carrie said, "what do you want to do?"

Tia shrugged. "Anything you want to do?"

"Not really. We can go to your house if you want. Where's your Jetty?"

"It's Jet, and he's not mine. And he...he's going out tonight." Tia sighed inwardly in relief. "So yeah. You can come to my house if you want."

Carrie shrugged. "Sure. You want to rent a movie?"

"Let's go."

When they got into the local movie rental shop, Carrie grabbed her arm. "Hey, look over there."

"What? Where?"

Carrie grabbed Tia's head and pointed it to the right direction. "It's Jet. Next to that fat old man."

"Yes, I see that," Tia replied, annoyed, taking her head out of Carrie's grasp.

Carrie wrinkled her nose suddenly.

"What?"

Carrie blinked a few times before answering. "This may disturb you, but...Jet is in the porno section."

"What? No."

"I hate to break it to you, love. That's where he is."

"But...he's...what?"

“He is in the porno section,” Carrie said to her as if talking to a three year old. Even though nobody would talk to a three year old about porn.

“Yes, I heard. But...wait a minute, how do you know it’s the porno section?”

Carrie grimaced. “Because my brother used to go there and stare at the DVD cases. And because if you look really carefully you see loads of pictures of women with huge boobs wearing extremely little.”

“You have good eyesight.”

“So. Any thoughts?”

“No, he was probably just walking through it.”

“He just picked one up. The one with the lady with the biggest boobs, too.”

“Shut up. Maybe it fell.”

“He’s bringing it up to the till.”

“We are leaving.”

~

When Jet went into her room later that night after Carrie had left and sat on her bed, Tia moved warily away from him.

“What’s wrong?” he asked her.

“Uh, what? No. Nothing’s wrong. Why, is there something wrong?” Her voice sounded strangely high-pitched.

He looked at her suspiciously. “No, but you sound like an opera singer.”

She forced a smile. “I...was singing in the shower. Kind of got stuck in the vibe, if you know what I mean.”

He clearly didn’t. “Okay,” he said, looking into her eyes. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

She avoided his gaze. “You...uh, you don’t want to know.”

“I do.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Yes, I do.”

“You asked for it.”

“Yes, I did.”

“Um, when Carrie and I were out tonight, we...” she trailed off, looking for the right words. “What the *hell* were you doing in the porno section?”

Jet frowned. “What? What porno section?”

“In the movie rental shop. Don’t shoot with me, Jet. I knew it was you. You picked up the DVD of the girl with the biggest boobs and took it to the till. You were renting porn and watching it in *my freaking house?*”

Jet grinned. “No. I was watching it at school.”

“You *WHAT?*”

“Tiana, calm down. I was kidding. I work at the movie rental shop. The fat old guy asked me for help. I simply randomly picked one off the shelf and took it to the till so that I could rent it to him.”

A surge of relief washed over Tia. “You promise?”

“I swear on my life. Besides, I don’t need porn to keep me busy at night,” he said, grinning. “I’ve got you.”

She stared at him for a minute, and then kicked him off the bed. “Get out of my room.”

Jet got up, still grinning. “I was kidding.”

“I don’t appreciate your sense of humour.”

“Look, Tiana, I don’t need any of that stuff. I’m pretty sure that even you know that I can have any girl I want whenever I want. I don’t need that. I work at the rental shop, that’s all.”

Tia sat back on her bed and silently thanked God. “I do not appreciate you replacing porn with me.”

“That was a joke.”

“A very unfunny one.”

“It was crude. But it was funny. My jokes are always funny.”

“You love your ego.”

“It’s like my other half.”

“It probably is your other half,” she muttered.

“I heard that.”

“You were supposed to.”

Jet got up and sat down on her bed again. “I should go to sleep now.”

“Why? It’s Saturday tomorrow.”

“Early shift.”

“How early?”

Jet bit his lip. “At four?”

“In the *morning*?”

He nodded.

“That’s insane.”

He shrugged. “I’m used to it.”

“But it’s already eleven thirty. You’re going to get four hours of sleep max!”

“That’s why I should go sleep now.”

“Right. Well, goodnight.”

He leant down and kissed her briefly. “Sweet dreams, Tiana.”

She mumbled something in reply, not quite able to collect her senses just yet.

He laughed softly.

“It’s not fair,” she grumbled. “You’re always so calm and cool and collected afterwards. I’m so...not that I can’t even speak properly.”

He cocked his head to one side. “I may seem calm and cool and collected afterwards, Tia, but trust me, I am not.”

“Prove it.”

He cleared his throat uncomfortably. “I’d rather not.”

“Why not?”

“Because...then I’d have to show you something you...shouldn’t be seeing just yet.”

Tia raised an eyebrow. “Does it have anything to do with...where Bingo usually heads to whenever he sees you?”

He nodded.

“Right. Okay. No need to prove it. You can go now.”

He grinned. “I’ll see you tomorrow night.”

11 - Chapter Eleven

When Tia woke up, it was ten thirty. She yawned. She'd never understand how Jet could wake up and go to work at four in the morning at the weekend.

Last night was very embarrassing, to say the least. She smiled when she remembered the Bingo-related comment before swinging herself out of bed and heading towards the bathroom to brush her teeth and take a shower.

She came out of the bathroom feeling refreshed, and then she ran smack bang into Jet.

"What the hell are you doing here?" she asked him after regaining her balance—which was very hard to do considering that she was wearing only a towel.

He put a hand on her arm to steady her. "My shift ended."

"Already?"

"What do you mean already? I've been working my @\$@ off for six hours."

"Right. Um, good for you. What were you doing?"

He shrugged. "Moving stuff."

"Uh, good. Okay. I have to go get changed. I'm getting my cast taken off today."

"Wow. Uh...good for you."

"I know," she called, going into her room and slamming the door close.

Well that was awkward.

~

"You'd think that I'd remember how to walk," Tia grumbled, hobbling along in the doctor's office.

"It's going to take a few weeks for you to learn how to walk again," the doctor said.

"But I've been walking for the past fourteen years of my life!"

"I understand," the doctor said sympathetically, obviously not understanding.

Tia plonked herself down on her chair. "I can't believe I've forgotten how to walk."

~

She was sitting on her bed, reading her book when suddenly Love Game started blaring out from her phone. She made a mental note to change her ringtone before snapping her phone open.

“Hello?”

“Tia.”

“Oh. Gary. Hi. What’s up?”

“Um, are you at home?”

“Yes. Why?”

“I...I have something to tell you.”

“Go ahead.”

“No, I kind of have to tell you...directly.”

“Uh, sure. Do you want to come over?”

“Okay. I’ll be there in five minutes.”

Gary lived a block away from her, so it was convenient for them to meet up sometimes. She slipped on her sunglasses so that when Gary came over she would have them on. She was forgetting to put her sunglasses on more frequently now. She was spending more time with Jet, which meant that she wasn’t allowed to wear her sunglasses.

When she had looked out her window that morning, an old woman who was shuffling across the road saw her eyes, muttered that she was a devil child and was nearly run over by a car.

Yes it was that bad.

Five minutes later, the doorbell rang and Tia rushed down the stairs to open the door.

Jet, however, got there first.

When he opened the door and Gary saw him, and then Tia standing there on the stairs, the colour drained from his face.

“I uh...I should go,” he mumbled.

“What? No. Gary. Come in.” Dammit. She had forgotten that Jet was in the house.

“No, it’s fine.”

“Gary, please. Come in. Jet was just—”

“I came by to drop off Tiana’s jacket,” Jet said smoothly, sensing the discomfort. “She left it at school. I’ll leave now.” He nodded at Tia before leaving the house.

Tia smiled at Gary as he walked hesitantly into the house.

“I haven’t been here for a long time,” he said finally.

“No, you haven’t,” she said, walking up the stairs into her room and beckoning Gary to follow her. “So, what was the thing you wanted to talk to me about?”

Gary closed the door behind him. “Uh, Tia,” he started. “I...really...really like you.”

Aw shoot.

“I really like you too Gary,” she said cheerfully, forcing a smile on her face. “You’re one of my best friends.”

“Is that it?” he asked her. “You only like me as one of your best friends?”

“Yep,” she answered lightly. “Is there any other way I’m supposed to like you?”

“No, I guess not,” he muttered.

“So...what was the thing you wanted to talk about?”

“Um, I forgot. I’ll...tell you when it comes to me.”

“Well, okay then. You want to stay for lunch?” she asked, feeling a bit sorry for him.

“No, I think I’m good.” He turned to leave the room.

Tia licked her lips. “Um, Gary?”

“Yeah?”

“Okay, I just heard this from Sarah, and I don’t know whether it’s true or not...but...apparently, Carrie really likes you.”

Gary raised his eyebrows then. “Really?”

Tia shrugged, glad that the awkwardness was temporarily gone. “From what I’ve heard, yeah.”

He nodded. “Right. Okay. Well...I’m going to go.”

“See you on Monday,” Tia called after him. The door closed. Tia groaned and slid down onto the floor with her back against the wall, burying her head in her hands.

~

“Hey,” Jet said, coming into the room after knocking on her door and she told whoever it was to come in.

“Hi,” she said glumly from where she was lying down on the floor.

He closed the door behind him. “You have a bed, an armchair, a desk, and there’s a bathtub down the corridor, and you choose to lie down on the floor?”

She sighed. “Leave me alone. I happen to like lying down on the floor.”

He sat down at her feet. “What’s wrong?”

She shook her head. “Nothing.”

He leaned forward and took off her sunglasses. “You don’t need these.” He tossed them onto the bed.

“Hey, be careful. Those are my best pair.”

“How many pairs do you have, exactly?”

She shrugged. “Ten, maybe?”

He reached forward again, grabbed her hands and pulled her up into a sitting position. “So. Tell me.”

“Tell you what?” she mumbled, very aware that she was now sitting between his legs which were bent at the knee.

He leaned forward a little. “What was Gary doing here?”

“Uh, he came to tell me...that he really liked me.”

“And what did you say?”

“I pretended not to know what the hell he was talking about and said that I liked him too...as a friend.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t like him that way and I don’t want it to be really awkward when I tell him that I don’t like him.”

“Oh?” A grin tugged at the corners of Jet’s mouth. “Is there some other guy you like?”

She grinned back. "Maybe."

"Care to tell me who?" he asked her, pulling her close to him and kissing a trail up her neck and down her jaw.

"Why don't you take a guess?" she said, trying hard not to choke or hyperventilate and willing her heart to slow down before she died of a heart attack.

"Why don't you just tell me?" he murmured as he let her down onto the floor gently and followed afterwards, still kissing her.

"Because I can't think straight right now," she breathed.

He laughed softly. "You're so unbelievably adorable."

Adorable? No one had ever called her adorable before. He started kissing her properly then and the coherent thoughts went away as quickly as they came.

There was a knock at the door and they sprang apart.

"Tia?" Her mother stuck her head in.

"Hi mom."

"Oh, Jet, I didn't realise you were in here too."

"Hi, Mrs. Green," Jet said, obviously not comfortable calling her by her first name when just five seconds ago he had been making out with her daughter.

"I was just about to ask Tia whether she had seen you, dear. I didn't see you in the morning before work."

"I was out with my friends," Jet lied smoothly. "Would you like some help at the café tonight, Mrs. Green?" he asked her, easily changing the subject.

"Oh, no, dear. It's alright. You have fun with Tia tonight. It's Saturday, after all. Enjoy your weekend."

He smiled. "I will. Thank you."

"I'm going to the café now. Just call if you need me, okay?"

They both nodded and said their goodbyes.

"So," Jet murmured afterwards. "Where were we?"

Tia grinned and waved his question away. "Oh, nothing interesting."

“Nothing interesting?”

“No.”

“Well I better make it interesting in case you die of boredom.”

“Yeah,” she said, giggling. “You better.”

~

“Want to go to lunch?” he asked her from where they were lying down on the floor.

“Let’s go.” She sat up. “I’m starving.”

He helped her up and they headed out the house.

“Where are we going?” she asked him.

He shrugged. “I don’t mind. Any place you want to go?”

She shook her head. Then she remembered that Jet had to actually work for his money and that it would be unseemly for her to make him spend his well-earned money on her. “Let’s go to the café.”

He raised his eyebrows at her. “You don’t mind the food there?”

“It’s not bad,” she admitted.

He grinned. “Told you.”

She rolled her eyes. “Whatever. Let’s go.”

~

“What are you two doing here?” Tia’s mother asked, bustling past them to get through to the customers.

“Well, we were wondering whether we could have lunch here,” Tia started, looking around the café. “But I think it’s kind of obvious that there aren’t any free tables, so I think we’re going to leave.”

“Sorry, dear,” her mother said apologetically. “Maybe another time.”

“Are you sure you don’t need help, Mrs. Green?” Jet asked her politely.

“No, thank you, Jet darling. Kiki and May will take care of it.” She nodded to the two part-time girls that were hurrying out of the kitchen with platefuls of food stacked expertly on their hands and arms.

~

“Jet, really. This place is too...expensive.”

He stopped. “I have money.”

“I know,” she said. “It’s just that...well...you worked hard for that money...and...it just doesn’t seem right to waste it all on me.”

He pulled her in for a kiss. “If the money’s spent on you, then it’s not a waste, Tiana. You’re worth it.”

That left her dizzy and giddy for the rest of the afternoon.